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SONS OF FIRE

A Novel

BY THE AUTHOR OF

"LADY AUDLEY'S SECRET," "VIXEN,"
"ISHMAEL," ETC.

Stereotyped Edition

LONDON
SIMPKIN, MARSHALL, HAMILTON, KENT & CO. LIMITED
STATIONERS' HALL COURT

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SONS OF FIRE.

CHAPTER I.

A STRIKING LIKENESS.

THE meet was at the Pig and Whistle, at Melbury, nine miles off. Rather a near meet—compared with the usual appointments of the South Sarum hounds—the ostler remarked, as Allan Carew mounted a hired hunter in the yard of the Duke's Head, chief, and indeed only possible inn for a gentleman to put up at, in the little village of Matcham, a small but prosperous hamlet, lying in a hollow of the hills between Salisbury and Andover. He had only arrived on the previous afternoon, and he was sallying forth in the crisp March morning, on an unknown horse in an unfamiliar country, to hunt with a pack whose master's name he had heard for the first time that day.

"Can he jump?" asked Allan, as he scrutinized the lean, upstanding bay; not a bad kind of horse by any means, but with that shabby, under-groomed and over-worked appearance common to hirelings.

"Can't he, sir? There ain't a better lepper in Wiltshire. And as clever as a cat! We had a lady staying here in the winter, Mrs. Colonel Parkyn, brought two 'acks of her own, besides the colonel's two 'unters, and liked this here horse better than any of 'em. She was right down mashed on him, as the young gents say."

"I wonder she didn't buy him," said Allan.

"She couldn't, sir. Money wouldn't buy such a hunter as this off my master. He's a fortune to us."

"I hope I may be of Mrs. Parkyn's opinion when I come home,"

said Allan. "Now then, ostler, just tell me which way I am to ride to get to the Pig and Whistle by eleven o'clock."

The ostler gave elaborate instructions. A public-house here, an accommodation lane there—a common to cross—a copse to skirt—three villages—one church—a post-office—and several cross-roads.

"You're safe to fall in with company before you get there," concluded the ostler, whisking a bit of straw out of the bay's off hind hoof, and eyeing him critically, previous to departure.

"If I don't, I doubt if I ever shall get there," said Allan, as he rode out of the yard.

He was a stranger in Matcham, a "foreigner," as the villagers called such alien visitors. He had never been in the village before, knew nothing of its inhabitants or its surroundings, its customs, ways, local prejudices, produce, trade, scandals, hates, loves, subserviencies, gods, or devils. And yet henceforward he was to be closely allied with Matcham, for a certain bachelor uncle had lately died and left him a small estate within a mile of the village—a relative with whom Allan Carew had held slightest commune, lunching or dining with him perhaps once in a summer, at an old family hotel in Albemarle Street, never honoured by so much as a hint at an invitation to his rural retreat, and not cherishing any expectation of a legacy, much less the bequest of all the gentleman's worldly possessions, comprising a snug, well-built house, in pretty and spacious grounds, with good and ample stabling, and with farms and homesteads covering something like fifteen hundred acres, and producing an income of a little over two thousand a year.

It need hardly be stated that Allan Carew was not a poor man when this unexpected property fell into his lap.

The children of this world are rarely false to the gospel precept —to every one which hath shall be given. Allan's father had changed his name, ten years before, from Beresford to Carew, upon his succession to a respectable estate in Suffolk, an inheritance from his maternal grandfather, old Squire Carew, of Fendyke Hall, Millfield.

Allan, an only son, was not by any means ill provided for when his maternal uncle, Admiral the Honourable George Darnleigh, took it into his head to leave him his Wiltshire property; but this bequest raised him at once to independence, and altogether dispensed with any further care about that gentleman-like profession, the Bar, which had so far repaid Mr. Carew's collegiate studies, labours, outlays, and solicitude by fees amounting in all to seven

pounds seven shillings, which sum represented the gross earnings of three years.

So, riding along the rustic high-road, in the clear morning air, under a sky of brightest sapphire, just gently flecked with ragged cloudlets of fleecy white, Allan Carew told himself that it was a blessed escape to have done with chambers, and reading law, and waiting for briefs; and that it was a good thing to be a country gentleman; to have his own house and his own stable; not to be obliged to ride another man's horses, even though that other man were his very father; not to be told after every stiffish day across country that he had done for the grey, or that the chestnut's legs had filled as never horse's legs filled before, nor to hear any other reproachful utterances of an old and privileged stud-groom, who knew the horses he rode were not his own property. Henceforth his stable would be his own kingdom, and he would reign there absolute and unquestioned. He could choose his own horses, and they should be good ones. He naturally shared the common creed of sons, and looked upon all animals of his father's buying as screws and "duffers." His own stables would be something altogether different from the drowsy old stables at home, where horses were kept and cherished because they were familiar friends, rather than with a view to locomotion. His stud and his stable should be as different as if horses and grooms had been bred upon another planet.

He loved field-sports. He felt that it was in him to make a model squire, albeit two thousand a year was not a large revenue in these days of elegant living and Continental holidays, and eclectic tastes. He felt that among his numerous nephews, old Admiral Darnleigh had made a wise selection in choosing him, Allan Carew, to inherit his Wiltshire estate. He meant to be prudent and economical. He had spent the previous afternoon in a leisurely inspection of Beechhurst. He had gone over house and stables, and had found all things so well planned, and in such perfect order, that he was assailed by none of those temptations to pull down and to build, to alter and to improve, which often inaugurate ruin in the very dawn of possession. He thought he might build two or three loose boxes on one side of the spacious stable-yard. There were two packs within easy reach of Matcham, to say nothing of packs accessible by rail, and he would naturally want more hunters than had sufficed for the old sailor, who had jogged out on his clever cob two or three times a week, and had gone home early, after artful riding

and waiting about the lanes, or to leeward of the great bare hills, and in snug corners, where a profound knowledge of the country enabled him to make sure of the hounds. Allan's hunting-stable would be on a very different footing, and although Beechhurst provided ample accommodation for a stud of eight, Allan told himself that one of his first duties would be to build loose boxes.

"I shall often have to put up a couple of horses for a friend," he thought.

The morning was lovely, more like April than March. The bay trotted along complacently, neither lazy nor feverishly active, but with an air of knowing what he had to do for his day's wage, and meaning honestly to do it. Allan was glad that his road took him past Beechhurst. Possession had still all the charm of novelty. His heart thrilled with pride as he slackened his pace to gaze fondly at the pretty white house, low and long, with a verandah running all along the southern front, admirably placed upon a gentle elevation, against the swelling shoulder of a broad down, facing south-west, and looking over garden and shrubbery, and across a stretch of common, that lay sloping between Beechhurst and the high-road, and gave a dignified aloofness to the situation; seclusion without dulness, a house and grounds remote, but not buried or hidden.

"Nothing manorial about it," mused Allan; "but it certainly looks a gentleman's place."

He would naturally have preferred something less essentially modern. He would have liked Tudor chimneys, panelled walls, and a family ghost. He would have liked to know that his race had taken deep root in the soil, had been lords of the manor centuries and centuries ago, when Wamba was keeping pigs in the woods, and when the jester's bells mixed with the merry music of hawk and hound. Admiral Darnleigh, so far as Wiltshire was concerned, had been a new man. He had made his money in China, speculating in tea-gardens, and other property, while pursuing his naval career with considerable distinction. He had retired from active service soon after the Chinese war, a C.B. and a rich man, had bought Beechhurst a bargain—during a period of depression—and had settled down in yonder pretty white house, with a small but admirable establishment, each member thereof a pearl of price among servants, and had there spent the tranquil eventide of an honourable and consistently selfish life. He had never married. As a single man, he had always felt himself rich; as a married man

he might often have felt himself poor. He had heard Allan at five and twenty declare that he had done with the romance of life, and that he, too, meant to be a bachelor; aud it may be that this boyish assertion, carelessly made over a bottle of Lafitte, did in some measure influeuce the Admiral's choiee of an heir.

Allan's father and mother were of a more liberal mind.

"You are in a better position than your father was at your age," said Lady Emily Carew, on her son's aecession to fortune. "I hope you will marry well—and soon."

There was no thought of woman's love, or of married bliss, in Allan Carew's mind, as he rode through the lanes and over a common, and across a broad streteh of open down to the Pig and Whistle. He was full, not of his inner self, but of the outer world around and about him, pleased with the pleasant country in which his lot was cast, wondering what his new neighbours were like, and how they would reeeive him.

"I wonder whether the South Sarum is a hospitable hunt, or whether the members are a surly lot, and look upon every stranger as a sponge and an interloper," he mused.

He had ridden alone for about half the way, when a man in grey fustian and leather gaiters, who looked like a small tenant farmer, trotted past him, turned and stared at him with obvious astonishment, touched his hat and rode on, after a few words of greeting, which were lost in the clatter of hoofs.

He had ridden right so far by the aid of memory; he now followed the man in grey, and, taking care to keep this pioneer in view, duly arrived at a small rustic inn, standing upon high ground, and overlooking an undulating sweep of woodland and common, marsh and plain, one of those pieturesque oases which diversify the breadth of wind-swept downs. The inn was an isolated building, the few labourers' cottages within reach being hidden by a turn of the road.

Hounds and hunt-servants were clustered on a level green on the other side of the road, but there was no one else upon the ground.

Allan looked at his watch, and found that it was ten minutes to eleven.

The man in grey had dismounted from his serviceable cob, and was standing on the greensward, talking to the huntsman. Huntsman and whip had taken off their caps to Allan as he rode up, and it seemed to him that there was at once more respect and more friendliness in the salutation than a stranger usually receives—

above all a stranger in heather cloth and butcher boots, and not in the orthodox pink and tops. The man in grey, and the hunt-servants, were evidently talking of him as he sat solitary in front of the inn. Their furtive glances in his direction fully indicated that he was the subject of their discourse.

"They take a curious interest in strangers in these parts," thought Allan.

Two minutes afterwards, a stout man, with a weather-beaten red face showing above a weather-beaten red coat, rode up with two other men. Evidently the master and his satellites.

"Hulloa!" cried the jovial man, "what the deuce brings you back so much sooner than Mrs. Wornock expected you? She told me there was no chance of our seeing you for the next year. When did you arrive? I never heard a word about it."

The master's broad doeskin palm was extended to Allan in the most cordial way, and the master's broad red face irradiated kindliest feelings.

"You are under a misapprehension, sir," said Allan, smiling at the frank, friendly face, amused at the eager rapidity of speech which had made it impossible for him to interrupt the speaker. "I have never yet enjoyed the privilege of a day with the South Sarum, and this is my first appearance in your neighbourhood."

"And you ain't Geoffrey Wornock," exclaimed the master, utterly discomfited.

"My name is Carew."

"Ah, your voice is different. I should have known you were not Geoff if I had heard you speak. And now, of course, when one looks deliberately, there is a difference—a difference which would be more marked, I dare say, if Wornock were here. Are you a relation of Wornock's?"

"I never heard the name of Wornock in my life until I heard it from you."

"Well, I'm—dashed," cried the master, suppressing a stronger word as premature so early in the day. "Did you see the likeness, Champion?" asked the master, appealing to one of his satellites.

"Of course I did," replied Captain Champion. "I was just as much under a delusion as you were—and yet—Mr. Carew's features are not the same as Wornock's—and his eyes are a different colour. It's the outlook, the expression, the character in the face that is so like our friend's—and I think that kind of likeness impresses one more than mere form and outline."

"Hang me if I know anything about it, except that I took one man for the other," said the master, bluntly. "Well, Mr. Carew, I hope you will excuse my blunder, and that we may be able to show you some sport on your first day in our country. We'll draw Wellout's Wood, Hamper, and if we don't find there we'll go on to Holiday Hill."

Hounds and servants went off merrily across the down, and dipped into a winding lane. A good many horsemen had ridden up by this time, with half a dozen ladies among them. Some skirmished across the fields, others crowded the lane, and in this latter contingent rode the master, with his hounds in front of him, and Carew at his side.

"Are you staying in the neighbourhood?" he asked; "or did you come by rail this morning? A long ride from Matcham Road station, if you did."

"I am staying at the Duke's Head, at Mateham; but I only arrived yesterday. I am going to settle in your neighbourhood."

"Indeed. Have you bought a place?"

"No."

"Ah, going to rent one. Wiser, perhaps, till you see how you like this part of the country."

"I have had a place left me by my uncle, Admiral Darnleigh."

"What! are you Darnleigh's heir? Yes, by-the-by, I heard that Beechhurst was left to a Mr. Carew; but I've a bad memory for names. So you have got Beechhurst, have you? I congratulate you. A charming place, compact, snug, warm, and in perfect order. Stables a trifle small, perhaps, for a hunting man."

"I am going to extend them," said Allan, with suppressed pride.

"Then you are going to do the right thing, sir. The only part in which Beechhurst falls short of perfection is in the stables. Capital stables, as far as they go, but it isn't far enough for a man who wants to hunt five days a week, and accommodate his hunting friends. Besides, the owner of Beechhurst ought to be in a position to take the hounds at a push."

"I hope it may be long before that push comes," said Allan.

"Ah, you're very kind; but I'm not so young as I was once, nor so rich as I was once—and—the Preacher says there's a time for all things. My time is very nearly past, and your time is coming, Mr. Carew. When do you establish yourself at Beechhurst?"

"I am going back to London to-morrow to settle a few matters,

and perhaps have a look round at Tattersall's, and I hope to be at Beechhurst in less than a fortnight."

"I shall do myself the pleasure of calling upon you. Any wife?"

"I am still in the enviable position my uncle enjoyed till his death."

"A bachelor? Ah! that won't last long. It's all very well for a sun-dried old sailor to keep the fair sex at arm's length; but *you* won't be able to do it, Mr. Carew. I give you till our next hunt-ball for a free man. You've no notion what complexions our Wiltshire women have—Devon can't beat 'em—or what a lot of pretty girls there are within a fifteen-mile drive of Matcham."

"I look forward with a thrill of mingled rapture and apprehension to your next hunt-ball."

"It'll be here before you know where you are. We have postponed it till the first of May. We shall kill our May fox on the thirtieth of April, and dance on his grave on the first."

"I shall be there, my lord," said Allan, as Lord Hambury galloped off after his huntsman, who had just put the hounds into the covert.

A whimper proclaimed that there was something on foot, five minutes afterwards, and the business of the day began—a goodish day, and a long one—two foxes run to earth, and one killed on the edge of twilight. It was seven o'clock when Allan Carew arrived at the Duke's Head, hungry and thirsty, and not a little bored by having been obliged to explain to various people that he was no relation to Geoffrey Wornock.

He had been too much bored at this enforced reiteration to make any inquiries about this double of his in the course of the day, or during the long homeward ride; but when he had taken the edge off his appetite in his cosy sitting-room at the Duke's Head, he began to question the waiter, as he trifled with the customary hotel tart, a hollow cavern of short crust enclosing a scanty modicum of bottled gooseberries.

"Do you know Mr. Wornock?"

"Yes, sir; know him uncommonly well. Wonderful likeness between him and you, sir; thought you was him till I heard you speak."

"Our voices are different, I am told."

"Yes, sir, there's a difference. It ain't much—but it's just enough to make one doubtful like. Your voice is deeper and stronger than his. And then, after the first glance, one can see it

ain't the same face," pursued the waiter, thoughtfully. "You've got such a look of him, you see, sir. That's what it is. One don't stop to think of the shape of a nose or a chin. It's the look that catches the heye. I suppose that's what people means by a speaking countenance, sir," added the waiter, garrulous, but not disrespectful.

"Has Mr. Wornock any land in the county?" asked Allan.

"Land, sir? Yes, sir," replied the waiter, with a touch of wonder at being asked such a question. "Mr. Wornock is Lord of the Manor of Discombe, sir—a very large estate—and a fine old house, added to by Mr. Wornock's grandfather. The old part is very old, sir, and the new part is very fine and picturesque—and the gardens are celebrated in these parts, sir—quite a show place—but Mrs. Wornock never allows it to be shown. She lives very secluded, don't give no entertainments herself, nor visit scarce anywheres. They do say that she was not right in her mind for some years after Mr. Wornock's birth, but that's six and twenty years ago, and there may not be any truth in the report. Gongozorla, sir, or cheddar?"

"Neither, thanks. Are the Wornocks an old family?"

"Very old family, sir. Old Saxon name. Came over with Edward the Confessor."

"And who was Mrs. Wornock?"

"Ah, there's a little 'itch there, sir. Nobody knows who Mrs. Wornock was, or where she came from—and they do say she wasn't county, which is a pity, seeing that the Wornocks had always married county prior to that marriage," added the waiter, proud of his concluding phrase.

"Mr. Wornock is abroad, I understand. Where?"

"Inja, sir. Cavalry regiment, the Eighteenth South Sarum Lancers."

"Strange for a man owning so fine a property to go into the army."

"Well, sir, don't you see, the life at the Manor must have been a very dull one for a young gentleman. No entertainments. No staying company. Mrs. Wornock, she don't care for nothink but music—and, after all, sir, music ain't everythink to a young man. He 'unted, and he 'unted, and he 'unted, from the time he 'ad legs to cross a pony. Wherever there was 'ounds to be followed, he went with 'em. But hunting ain't everythink in life, and it don't last long," added the waiter, philosophically.

"Mrs. Wornock, as dowager, should have withdrawn to her

dower-house, and left the young man free to be as jovial as he liked at the Manor."

"Ah, that may come to pass when he marries, sir, but not before. Mr. Wornock is a devoted son. He'd be the last to turn his mother out-of-doors. And he's almost as keen on music as his mother, I've heard say; plays the fiddle just like a professional—and the organ."

"Well," sighed Carew, having heard all he wanted to hear, "I bear no grudge against Mr. Geoffrey Wornock because he happens to resemble me, but I wish with all my heart that he could have made it convenient to live in any other neighbourhood than that in which my lot is cast. That will do, waiter, I don't want any more wine. You may clear the table, and bring me some tea at nine o'clock."

The waiter cleared the table, in a leisurely way, made up the fire, also in a leisurely way, and contrived to spend a quarter of an hour upon work that might have been done in five minutes; but Allan questioned him no further. He flung himself back in an easy-chair, with his slippered feet upon the fender, and meditated with closed eyes.

Yes, it was a bore, a decided bore, to have a double in the neighbourhood. A double richer, more important, and altogether better placed than himself; a double in a Lancer regiment—there is at once chic and attractiveness in a cavalry soldier—a double who owned just the kind of fine old manorial estate, fine old manorial mansion which he, Allan, would have liked to possess.

Beechhurst might be a snug little property; the house might be perfection, as Lord Hambury had averred; but when a house of that calibre is said to be perfect, the adjective rarely means anything more than a good kitchen, and a convenient butler's pantry, roomy cellars, and a well-planned staircase; whereas, to praise a Tudor manor house implies that it contains a panelled hall, and a spacious ball-room, a library with a groined roof, and a music-gallery in the dining-room. After hearing of Wornock's old house, built when the fight at Bosworth was fresh in the memories of men, and amplified by successive generations, Allan felt that Beechhurst was distinctly middle-class, and that his sailor uncle must have been a poor creature to have found pride and pleasure in such a cockney paradise.

He jumped up out of his easy-chair, shook himself, and laughed aloud at his own pettiness.

"What an envious brute I am!" he said to himself. "I dare say, when Wornock comes home, I shall find him a decent fellow, and we shall get to be good friends. If we do, I'll tell him how I was gnawed with envy of his better fortune before ever I saw his face."

CHAPTER II.

ALLAN CAREW'S PEOPLE.

ALLAN CAREW spent the best part of the following day at Beechhurst, better pleased with his inheritance than he would confess even to himself. The Admiral's Chinese experiences had not been without tangible result. The hall was decorated with curios whose value their present possessor could only guess, and if the greater part of the house was prim and commonplace, there was one room which was both handsome and original—this was the Admiral's smoking-room and library, a spacious apartment which looked as if it had been added to the original structure, and which was built on the model of a Mandarin's reception-room. Yes, on the whole, Allan was inclined to think his lot had fallen on a pleasant heritage. He went up to town in good spirits; spent ten days in looking at hunting studs at Tattersall's, and made his modest selection with care and prudence, content to start his stable with a stud of four good hunters, a dog-cart horse, a pony to fetch and carry, two grooms and a stable-help.

The all-important business of the stable concluded, he went back to Suffolk to spend Easter in the bosom of his family, and to tell his father what he had done. There was perfect harmony of feeling, and frankest confidence between father and son, and the son's regard for the father was all the stronger because, under that quiet and somewhat languid bearing of the Squire of Fendyke, Allan suspected hidden depths. Of the history of his father's youth, or the history of his father's heart, the son knew nothing; yet, fondly as he loved his mother, the excellent and popular Lady Emily, he had a shrewd suspicion that she was not the kind of woman to have won his father's heart in the days when love means romance rather than reason. That she possessed her husband's warm affection now, he, the son, was fully assured; but he was equally assured that the

alliance had been passionless, a union of two honourable minds, rather than of two loving hearts.

There was that in his father's manner of life which to Allan's mind told of a youth overshadowed by some unhappy experience; and a word dropped now and then, in the father's talk of his son's prospects and hopes, a hint, a sigh, had suggested an unfortunate love-affair.

His mother was more communicative, and had told her son frankly that she was not his father's first love.

"You remember your grandmother, Allan?" she said.

Yes, Allan remembered her distinctly—an elderly woman dressed in some rich silken fabric, always black, with a silver chatelaine at her side, on which there hung a curious old enamelled watch that he loved to look at. A tall slender figure, a thin aquiline countenance, with silvery hair arrayed in feathery curls under a honiton cap. She had been always kind to him; but no kindness could dispel the awe which she inspired.

"I used to dream of her," he said. "Had she a frightening voice, do you think? She was mixed up in most of my childish nightmares."

"Poor Allan!" laughed his mother. "She was an excellent woman, but she loved to command; and one can't command affection, not even the affection of a child. It was she who made your father marry me. He liked me, and I liked him, and we had been playfellows; but we should never have thought of marrying if your grandmother had not, in a manner, insisted upon it. She told George that I was deeply in love with him; and she told me that George was devoted to me; and so we could not help ourselves. And, after all," she went on, with a comfortable sigh, "it has answered very well. I don't think we could possibly be fonder of our home, or of each other, than we are. And your father has his books, and his shooting and fishing, and I have my farm and my schools—and," with a sudden gush of tenderness, "we both have you. You ought to be fond of us, Allan. You are the link that makes us one in heart and mind."

Allan was fond of them. Both parents had been undeviating in their indulgence, and he had given them love without stint. But it may be that he loved the somewhat silent and reserved father with a profounder affection than he gave to the open-hearted and loquacious mother. That vague consciousness of a secret in his father's life, of sorrows unforgotten, but never told, had evoked the

son's warmest sympathy. All that Allan had ever felt of sentiment or romantic feeling hitherto, he had felt for his father. It is not to be supposed that he had reached five and twenty without some commerce with Cupid, but his loves had been only passing fancies, sunbeams glancing on the surface of life's current, not those deep forces which change the course of the river.

The characters of father and mother were distinctly marked in their acceptance of Allan's good fortune. Lady Emily saw only the sunny side of the inheritance. She was delighted that her son should have ample means and perfect independence in the morning of life. She was full of matrimonial schemes on his behalf. Decidedly he ought to marry, well, and quickly. An only son, with an estate in possession, and another—his patrimonial estate—in prospective. It was his duty to found a family. She marshalled all the young women she knew in a mental review. There must be good family—a pure race, untarnished by the taint of commerce, unshadowed by hushed-up disgrace—divorces, bankruptcies, turf scandals. There should be money, because even the two estates would not make Allan a rich man, as the world reckons wealth nowadays; but they would give him a respectable platform from which to demand the hand of an heiress. He could woo the wealthiest without fear of being considered a fortune-hunter.

"It is sad to think you will like your own place better than this," said Lady Emily in her cheerfullest voice, "and that we shall hardly see you except at Christmas and Easter; but it is so nice to know that you are in a position to marry as early as you like without being under any obligation to your father; for, indeed, dear, what with his library and my farm, there would have been very little margin for a proper establishment for you."

"My dearest mother, why harp upon matrimony? I have made up my mind to follow your brother's excellent example."

"Poor Ted!" sighed Lady Emily. "He was in love with the belle of the season—a poor, foolish thing, with one long curl streaming over her left shoulder, and a frock that you would laugh at, if you could see her to-day. Of course Ted's chances were hopeless—a younger son, with a commander's pay, eked out by a pittance from his father. She used to ride in the Row with a plume in her hat—half a Spanish fowl—quite the right thing, I assure you, at that time. Ted was twelve years older than I, you know, Allan; and I was still in short petticoats when he went off to China broken-hearted. Of course she wouldn't have him, though

she said he was the best waltzer in London. Her people wouldn't let her look at him even, from a matrimonial point of view."

Allan went to church with his mother on Easter morning—attended two services in the fine old church, which seemed much too grand and too big for the tiny town—her loving heart swelling with pride at having such an admirable son. Her friends had always been fond of him, but now it seemed to her there was a touch of deference in their kindness. They had liked him as *her* son, and the inheritor of Fendyke Hall; but perhaps they liked him even a little better now that he was his own master, a man of independent means.

He accompanied Lady Emily in her weekly visit to the schools; he assisted in dealing out Easter gifts to the school-children, and distributed half a dozen pounds of the very strongest obtainable tobacco among his male acquaintance in the village of Fendyke—a village consisting of a rectory, three picturesque farmhouses, a still more picturesque water-mill and miller's house, a roomy old barn-like inn, said to have once given shelter to good Queen Bess, and of between twenty and thirty cottages grouped in threes and fours along the broad, level road, or scattered in side lanes.

The morning of Easter Monday was given to an inspection of Lady Emily's white farm — that farm which, next to her son, was the greatest pride and delight of her innocent and strictly rural life. Here, all buildings and all creatures were of an almost dazzling purity. White horses at the plough, a white fox-terrier running beside it, white birds in the poultry-yard, white cows in the meadow—cows from Lord Cawdor's old white Pembroke breed, cows from Blickling Park and Woodbastwick—white cottages for bailiff and farm-labourers, white palings, white pigs, and white donkeys, a white peacock sunning himself on the top of the clipped yew-hedge in the bailiff's garden, white tulips, white hyacinths in the flower-beds. To procure all this whiteness had cost trouble and money; but there are few home-farms which give as much delight to their possessors as this white farm gave to Lady Emily Carew. She had as much pride in its perfection as the connoisseur who collects only Wedgwood, or only Florentine Majolica, has in his collection. It is not so much the actual value of the thing as the fact that the thing is unique, and has cost the possessor years of patience and labour. Lady Emily would take a long journey to look at a white cow, or to secure Brahma or Cochin China fowls of unsullied whiteness.

It was a harmless, simple, womanly hobby, and although Lady Emily's farm was a somewhat costly toy, it served to give her status in the neighbourhood, and it provided labour for a good many people, who were well housed and well looked after, and whose children astonished the school-inspectors by the thoroughness of their education. No incompetent master or mistress could have held on in the schools where Lady Emily was a power. She cultivated a friendly familiarity with the man and woman who taught her cottage children; she asked them to quiet, confidential luncheons three or four times in a quarter; she sounded their opinions, plucked out the heart of their mystery, lent them books, stuffed them with her own ideas, and, in a manner, made them her mouthpiece. Intensely conservative as to her opinions and prejudices, and with an absolute loathing for all radical and revolutionary principles, she was yet, by the beneficence of her nature, more liberal than many a professing demagogue, and would fain have admitted all her fellow-creatures to an equal share in the good things of this life. Her warm heart was full of compassion for the hard lives she saw around her—hard even where the condition of the agricultural labourer was at its best—and it was her delight to introduce into these hard lives occasional glimpses of a happier world—a world of pleasure and gaiety, laughter and frolic. Lady Emily's Christmas and Whitsun balls for the villagers and servants; Lady Emily's May-day feast for the children; Lady Emily's midsummer picnic and harvest-home; and Lady Emily's fairy fir-tree, which reached to the ceiling of the boys' schoolroom, every branch laden with benefits—these were events which broke the slow monotony of each laborious year, joys to dream of and to remember in many a dull week of toil. Second only to these festive gatherings in helpfulness were Lady Emily's coal and blanket society, savings bank, and mothers' meeting—the last a friendly, familiar gathering held in a spacious old building which had been a brewery in the days when every country gentleman's household brewed its own beer. Once a week, through the winter season, Lady Emily sat in the old brewery, with a circle of cottagers' wives sewing industriously, while she talked and read to them. Tea and bread and butter, a roaring wood fire, and a bright lamp, were the only material comforts provided; but these and Lady Emily's friendly welcome and pleasant talk, with the short story chosen out of a magazine, and the familiar chapter of the New Testament, read far better than vicar or curate read it in church, sufficed to make

the mothers' meeting a cheerful break in the cottage matron's busy week. She went back to her homely hearth cheered and encouraged. Lady Emily had told her the latest news of the great busy world outside Fendyke, had given her a recipe for a new savoury pie of ox-cheek and twopenny rice, or a new way of making barley broth; or had given her a "cutting" for her tiny flower-garden, or had cut out her new Gari*bawl*di. Lady Emily had been to her as a friend and counseller.

The village remembered with a shudder that long dreary winter when the great house was empty, while Mr. Carew and his wife were in Egypt—ordered there by the doctors, after a serious illness of the squire's.

Much had been done for the sick and the poor even in that desolate winter, for the housekeeper had been given a free hand; but no one could replace Lady Emily, and the gaiety of Fendyke had been extinguished.

CHAPTER III.

"A HOME OF ANCIENT PEACE."

THE hunting was nearly over by the time Allan Carew had established himself at Beechhurst and completed his stud. The selection of half a dozen hunters had given him an excuse for running up to London once or twice a week; and he had found the convenience of express trains between Salisbury and Waterloo as compared with the slow and scanty train service between Fendyke and Cambridge, which made a journey from his native village a trial of youthful patience.

London was full of pleasant people at this after-Easter season, so Allan took his time at Tattersall's, saw his friends, dined them, or dined with them, at those clubs which young men most affect, went to his favourite theatres, rode in the Park, and saw a race or two at Sandown, all in the process of buying his horses; but at last the stud was complete, and his stud-groom, a man he had brought from Suffolk, the man who taught him to ride, had shaken a wise head, and told his young master to stop buying.

"You've got just as many as you can use, Mr. Allan," he said, "and if you buy another one, it 'ud mean another b'y, and we shall have b'ys enough for me to keep in order as it is."

So Allan held his hand. "And now I am a country gentleman," he said, "and I must go and live on my acres."

Everybody in the neighbourhood wanted to know him. He was under none of the disadvantages of the new man about whom people have to ask each other, "Who is he?" He came to Matcham with the best possible credentials. His father was a man of old family, against whose name no evil thing had ever been written. His mother was an earl's daughter; and the estate which was his had been left him by a man whose memory was respected in the neighbourhood—a man of easy temper and open hand, a kind master, and a staunch friend.

Allan found his hall-table covered with cards when he returned from his London holiday, and he was occupied for the next fortnight in returning the calls that had been made for the most part in his absence. To a shy young man this business of returning calls in an unknown land would have been terrible—invading unfamiliar drawing-rooms, and seeing strange faces, wondering which of two matrons was his hostess and which the friend or sister-in-law—an ordeal as awful as any mediæval torture; but Allan was not shy, and he accepted the situation with a winning ease which pleased everybody. When he blundered—and his blunders were rare—he laughed at his mistake, and turned it into a jest that served to help him through the first five minutes of small-talk. He had a quick eye, and in a room full of people saw at a glance the welcoming smile and extended hand which marked his hostess. "Quite an acquisition to the neighbourhood," said everybody, and the mothers of marriageable daughters were as eager to improve the acquaintance as Jane Austen's inimitable Mrs. Bennett was to cultivate the irreproachable Bingley.

In the course of that round of visits Allan contrived to find out a good deal about the neighbourhood which was henceforward to be his home.

He discovered that it was, above all, a hunting neighbourhood; but that it was also a shooting neighbourhood; and that there was bad blood between the men who wanted to preserve pheasants and the men who wanted to hunt foxes. From the point of view of the rights of property, the shooters would appear to be in their right, since they only wanted to feed and foster birds on their own land; while the hunting-man—were he but the season-ticket-holding solicitor from Bloomsbury—wanted to hunt his fox over land which belonged to another man, and to spoil that other man's

costly sport in the pursuit of a pleasure which cost him, the season-ticket holder, at most a stingy subscription to the hunt he affected. But, on the other hand, hunting is a strictly national sport, and shooting is a selfish hole-and-corner kind of pleasure; so the hunting men claimed immemorial rights and privileges as against the owners of woods and copses, and the hatchers of pheasants.

Allan found another and more universal sport also in the ascendant at Matcham. The neighbourhood had taken lately to golf, and that game had found favour with old and young of both sexes. Everybody could not hunt, but everybody could play golf, or fancy that he or she was playing golf, or, at least, look on from a respectful distance while golf was being played. The golf-links on Matcham Common had therefore become the most popular institution in the neighbourhood, and people came from afar to see the young ladies of Matcham contest for the bangles and photograph frames which the golf club offered as the reward of the strong arm and the accurate eye.

Allan, who could turn his hand to most things in the way of physical exercise, was able to hold his own with the members of the golf club, and speedily became a familiar figure on the links. Here, as elsewhere, he met people who told him he was like Geoffrey Wornock, and who praised Wornock's skill at golf just as other people had praised his riding or his shooting.

"He seems to be something of a Crichton, this Wornock of yours," Allan said sometimes, with a suspicion of annoyance.

He was sick of being told of his likeness to this man whom he had never seen—weary of hearing the likeness discussed in his presence; weary of being told that the resemblance was in expression rather than in actual feature; that there was an indefinable something in his face which recalled Wornock in an absolutely startling manner; while the details of that face taken separately were in many respects unlike Wornock's face.

"Yet it is more than what is generally called a family likeness," said Mrs. Mornington of the Grove, a personage in the neighbourhood, and the cleverest woman among Allan's new acquaintances. "It is the individuality, the life and movement of the face, that are the same. The likeness is a likeness of light and shade rather than of line and colour."

There was a curious feeling in Allan's mind by the time this kind of thing had been said to him in different forms of speech by nearly everybody he knew in Matcham—a feeling which was partly irrita-

tion, partly interest in the man whose outward likeness to himself might be allied with some identity of mind and inclinations.

"I wonder whether I shall like him very much, or hate him very much," he said to Mrs. Mornington. "I feel sure I must do one or the other."

"You cannot help liking him. He is not the kind of man for anybody to hate," answered the lady quickly; and then, growing suddenly thoughtful, she added, "You may find a something wanting in his character, perhaps; but you cannot dislike him. He is thoroughly likeable."

"What is the something wanting which you have found?"

"I did not say I had found——"

"Oh, but you would not have suggested that I might discover the weak spot if you had not found it yourself!"

"You are as searching as a cross-examining counsel," said Mrs. Mornington, laughing at him. "Well, I will be perfectly frank with you. To my mind, Geoffrey's character suffers from the fault which doctors—speaking of a patient's physical condition—call want of tone. There is a want of mental tone in Geoffrey. I have known him from a boy. I like him; I admire his talents. He and my sons were at Eton together. I have seen more of him perhaps than any one else in this neighbourhood. I like him—I am sorry for him."

"Why sorry? Has he not all the good things of this world?"

"Not all. He lost his father before he was five years old; and his mother is, I fear, a poor creature."

"Eccentric, I understand."

"Lamentably so—a woman who isolates herself from all the people whose society would do her good, and who opens her door to any spirit-rapping charlatan whose tricks become public talk. Poor thing! One ought not to be angry with her, but it is provoking to see such a place as Discombe in the possession of a woman who is utterly unable to fill the position to which she has been elevated."

"Who *was* Mrs. Wornock before she became Mrs. Wornock? I have heard hints——"

"Yes, and you are never likely to hear more than hints," retorted Mrs. Mornington, impatiently. "Nobody in this neighbourhood knows who Mrs. Wornock was. No creature of her kith or kin has ever been seen at Discombe. I don't suppose her son knows anything more of her antecedents than you or I. Old Squire Wornock left Discombe about seven and twenty years ago to drink the waters

of some obscure spring in Bohemia—a place nobody hereabouts had ever heard of. He was past sixty when he set out on that journey, a confirmed bachelor. One would as soon have expected him to bring back the moon as to bring a wife, but to the utter stupefaction of all his friends and acquaintance, he returned with a pretty-looking delicate young creature he had married in Germany—at Dresden, I believe—and who looked much more like dying within the next five years than he did."

"Did he introduce her to his neighbours? Was she well received?"

"Oh, she was received well enough. Mr. Wornock was not the kind of man to marry a disreputable person. People took her on trust. She seemed painfully shy, and her only merit in society was that she sang very prettily. Everybody called upon her, but she did not respond warmly to our advances; and about six months after her marriage there were rumours of an alarming kind about her health—her mental health. Our own good little doctor, dear old Mr. Podmore, who had attended three generations of Wornocks, shook his head when he was questioned about her. 'Was it serious,' people asked—for I suppose you know that in a neighbourhood as rustic as ours, if the doctor's carriage is seen at a particular house very often, people *will* ask questions of that doctor. Yes, it was very serious. We never got beyond that. Mr. Podmore was loyal to his patient, fondly as he loves a gossip. By-and-by we heard that Mr. Wornock had taken his young wife off to Switzerland. He who in his earlier life had seemed rooted to the soil was off again to the Continent, and Discombe was shut up once more. I'm afraid we all hated poor Mrs. Wornock. In a neighbourhood like ours, one detests anybody who disturbs the pleasant order of daily life. Dinners and hunting-breakfasts at Discombe were an element in our daily lives, and we resented their cessation. When I say we, I mean, of course, our men-folk."

"Were your men-folk long deprived of Mr. Wornock's hospitalities?"

"For ever," answered Mrs. Mornington, solemnly. "The Wornocks had only been gone half a year or so when we read the announcement of a son and heir, born at Grindelwald in the depth of winter. A nice place for the future owner of Discombe to be born in—Grindelwald—at the sign of the Bear! We were all indignant at the absurdity of the thing. This comes of an old man marrying a nobody, we said. Well, Mr. Carew, it was ages before

we saw anything more of the Wornocks. Geoffrey must have been three or four years old when his father and mother brought him to the house in which he ought to have been born—a poor little fragile Frenchified object, hanging on to a French *bonne*, and speaking nothing but French. Not one sentence of his native tongue did the little wretch utter for a year or two after he appeared among us!"

Allan laughed heartily at Mrs. Mornington's indignant recital of this ancient history. Her disgust was as fresh and as vigorous as if she were describing the events of yesterday.

"Was he a nice child?" he asked, when they had both had their laugh.

"Nice? Well, yes, he was nice, just as a French poodle is nice. He was very active and intelligent—hyper-active, hyper-intelligent. He frightened me. But the Wornocks and the Morningtons had been close friends from generation to generation, so I could not help taking an interest in the brat, and I would have been a cordial friend of the brat's mother, for poor old Wornock's sake, if she would have let me. But she wouldn't, or she couldn't, respond to a sensible, matter-of-fact woman's friendly advances. The poor thing was in the clouds then, and she is in the clouds now. She has never come down to earth. Music, spirit-rapping, thought-reading, slate-writing—what can one expect of a woman who gives all her mind to such things as those?—a woman who lets her housekeeper manage everything from cellar to garret, and who has no will of her own in her garden and hot-houses? I have known Mrs. Wornock seven and twenty years, and I know no more of her now than I knew when she came a stranger to Discombe. I call upon her three or four times a year, and she returns my calls, and sits in my drawing-room for twenty minutes or so looking miserable and longing to go. What can one do with such a woman?"

"Is it sheer stupidity, do you think?"

"Stupidity! No, I think not. She has anything but a stupid expression of countenance. She has an air of spirituality, as of a nature above the common world, which cannot come down to common things. I am told that in music she is really a genius; that her powers of criticism and appreciation are of the highest order. She plays exquisitely, both organ and piano. She has, or had, a heavenly soprano voice; but I have not heard her sing since Geoffrey's birth."

"She must be interesting," said Allan, with conviction.

"She *is* interesting—only she won't let one be interested in her."

"Can one get a look at her? Does she go to Matcham Church?"

"Never. That is another of her eccentricities. She either goes to that funny little old church you may have noticed right among the fields—Filbury parish church—nearly six miles from Discombe, or she drives thirteen miles to Salisbury Cathedral. I believe she sometimes plays the organ at Filbury. That organ was her gift, by the way. They had only a wretched harmonium when she came to Discombe."

"I shall go to Filbury Church next Sunday," said Allan.

"Shall you? I hope you are not forgetting the lapse of time. This interesting widow is only interesting from a psychological standpoint, remember. She must be five and forty years of age. Not even Cleopatra would have been interesting at forty-five."

"I am under no hallucination as to the lady's age. I want to see the mother of Geoffrey Wornock. It is Geoffrey Wornock in whom I am interested."

"Egotistical person! Only because Geoffrey is like you."

"Is there any man living who would not be interested in his double?"

"Ah, but he is not your double! The village mind is given to exaggeration. He has not your firm chin, nor your thoughtful brow. His face is a reminiscence of yours. It is weaker in every characteristic, in every line. You are the substance, he the reflection."

"Now, you are laughing at my egotism, and developing my vanity."

"No, believe me, no!" protested Mrs. Mornington, gaily. "I see you both with all your defects and qualities. You have the stronger character, but you have not Geoffrey's fascinating personality. His very faults are attractive. He is by no means effeminate; yet there is a something womanish in his nature which makes women fond of him. He has inherited his mother's sensitive, dreamy temperament. I feel sure he would see a ghost if there were one in his neighbourhood. The ghost would go to him instinctively, as dogs go unbidden to certain people—sometimes to people who don't care about them; while the genuine dog-lover may be doing his best to attract bow-wow's attention, and failing ignominiously."

"Every word you say increases my interest in Mr. Wornock. In a neighbourhood like this, where everybody is sensible and

commonplace and conventional, excepting always your brilliant self"—Mrs. Mornington nodded, and put her feet on the fender—"it is so delightful to meet some one who does not move just on the common lines, and is not worked by the common machinery."

"You will find nothing common about Geoffrey," said the lady. "I have known him since he was a little white boy in a black velvet suit, and he was just as enigmatical to me the day he left for Bombay as he was on his seventh birthday. I know that he has winning manners, and that I am very fond of him; and that is all I know about him."

Allan drove to Filbury on the following Sunday, and was in his place in the little old parish church ten minutes before the service began. The high oak pews were not favourable to his getting a good view of the congregation, since, when seated, the top of his head was only on a level with the top of his pew; but by leaving the door of the pew ajar he contrived to see Mrs. Wornock as she went up the narrow aisle—nave there was none, the pews forming a solid square in the centre of the church. Yes, he was assured that slim, graceful figure in a plain grey cashmere gown and grey straw bonnet must be Mrs. Wornock and no other. Indeed, the inference was easily arrived at, for the rest of the congregation belonged obviously to the small tenant-farmer and agricultural-labourer class—the women-folk homely and ruddy-cheeked, the men ponderous, and ill at ease in their Sunday clothes.

The lady in the grey gown made her way quietly to a pew that occupied the angle of the church nearest the pulpit and reading-desk—the old three-decker arrangement, for clerk, parson, and preacher. Mr. Wornock was patron of the living of Filbury and Discombe, and this large pew had belonged to the Wornocks ever since the rebuilding of the church in Charles the Second's reign, a year or two after the manor-house was built, when the estate, which had hitherto been an outlying possession of the Wornocks, became their place of residence, and most important property.

Allan could see only the lady's profile from his place in the body of the church—a delicate profile, worn as if with long years of thoughtfulness; a sweet, sad face that had lost all freshness of colouring, but had gained the spiritual beauty which grows in thought and solitude, where there are no vulgar cares to harass

and vex the mind. A pensive peacefulness was the chief characteristic of the face, Allan thought, when the lady turned towards the organ during the *Te Deum*, listening to the village voices, which sang truer than village voices generally do.

Allan submitted to the slow torture of a very long sermon about nothing particular, on a text in Nehemiah, which suggested not the faintest bearing on the Christian life—a sermon preached by an elderly gentleman in a black silk gown, whose eloquence would have been more impressive had his false teeth been a better fit. After the sermon there was a hymn, and the old-fashioned plate was carried round by a blacksmith, whom Allan recognized as a man who had fastened his hunter's shoe one day at a little forge on the outskirts of Filbury, in the midst of a run; and then the little congregation quietly dispersed, after an exchange of friendly greetings between the church door and the lych-gate.

Allan's gig was waiting for him near the gate, and a Victoria, on which he recognized the Wornock crest—a dolphin crowned—stood in the shade of a row of limes, which marked the boundary of the Vicarage garden. Allan waited a little, expecting to see Mrs. Wornock come out; and then, as she did not appear, he re-entered the churchyard, and strayed among moss-mantled tombstones, reading the village names, the village histories of birth and death, musing, as he read, upon the long eventless years which make the sum of rustic lives.

The blue pure sky, the perfume of a bean-field in flower, the hawthorns in undulating masses of snowy blossom, and here and there, in the angles of the meadows, the heaped-up gold of furze-bushes that were more bloom than bush—all these made life to-day a sensuous delight which exacted no questionings of the intellect, suggested no doubt as to the bliss of living. If it were always thus—a crust of bread and cheese under such a sky, a bed in the hollow of yonder bank between bean-field and clover, would suffice for a man's content, Allan thought, as he stood on a knoll in God's acre, and looked down upon the meadows that rose and fell over ridge and hollow with gentle undulations between Filbury and Discombe.

What had become of Mrs. Wornock? He had made the circuit of the burial-ground, pausing often to read an epitaph, but never relaxing his watchfulness of the carriage yonder, waiting under the limes. The carriage was there still, and there was no sign of Mrs. Wornock. Was there a celebration? No; he had seen all the

congregation leave the church, except the mistress of that curtained pew in the corner near the pulpit.

Presently the broad strong chords of a prelude were poured out upon the still air—a prelude by Sebastian Bach, masterful, imposing, followed by a fugue, whose delicate intricacies were exquisitely rendered by the player. Standing in the sunshine listening to that grand music, Allan remembered what Mrs. Mornington had told him. The player was Mrs. Wornock. He had seen the professional organist and schoolmaster leave the church with his flock of village boys. Mrs. Wornock had lingered in the church to gratify herself with the music she loved. He sauntered and loitered near the open window, listening to the music for nearly an hour. Then the organ sounds melted away in one last long rallentando, and presently he heard the heavy old key turn in the heavy old lock, and the lady in grey came slowly along the path to the lych-gate, followed by a clumsy boy, who looked like a smaller edition of the blacksmith. Allan stood within a few yards of the pathway to see her go by, hoping to be himself unobserved, screened by the angle of an old monument, where rust had eaten away the railing, and moss and lichen had encrusted the pompous Latin epitaph, while the dense growth of ivy had muffled the funeral urn. Here, in the shadow of ostentation's futile monument, he waited for that slender and still youthful form to pass.

In figure the widow of twenty years looked a girl, and the face which turned quickly towards Allan, her keen ear having caught the rustle of the long grass under his tread, had the delicacy of outline and transparent fairness of youth. The cheek had lost its girlish roundness, and the large grey eye was somewhat sunken beneath the thoughtful brow. Involuntarily Allan recalled a long familiar line—

"Thy cheek is pale with thought and not with care."

That expression of tranquil thoughtfulness changed in an instant as she looked at him; changed to astonishment, interrogation, which gradually softened to a grave curiosity, an anxious scrutiny. Then, as if becoming suddenly aware of her breach of good manners, the heavy eyelids sank, and a faint blush coloured the thin cheeks, and she hurried onward to the gate where her carriage had drawn up in readiness for her.

Her footman, in a sober brown livery, was holding the gate open for her. Her horses were shaking their bridles. She stepped

lightly into the Victoria, nodded an adieu to the schoolboy who had blown the organ bellows, and vanished into the leafy distance of the lane.

"So that is my double's mother. An interesting face, a graceful figure, and a lady to the tips of her fingers. Whether she is county, or not county, Geoffrey Wornock has no cause to be ashamed of his mother. Nothing would induce me to think ill of that woman."

He brooded on that startled expression which had flashed across Mrs. Wornock's face as she looked at him. Clearly she, too, had seen the likeness which he bore to her son.

"I wonder whether it pains her to be reminded of him when he is so far away," speculated Allan, "or whether she feels kindly towards me for the sake of that absent son?"

This question of his was answered three days later by the lady's own hand. Among the letters on Allan's breakfast-table on Wednesday morning there was one in a strange penmanship, which took his breath away, for on the envelope, in bold brown letters, appeared the address, Discombe Manor.

He thrust all his other letters aside—those uninteresting letters which besiege the man who is supposed to have money to spend, from tradesmen who want to work for him, charities who want to do good for him, stock-jobbers who want to speculate for him—the whole race of spiders in quest of the worried fly. He tore open the letter from Discombe Manor, and eagerly devoured the following lines:—

"DEAR SIR,—

"People tell me that you are kind and amiable, and I am emboldened by this assurance to ask you a favour. Etiquette forbids me to call upon you, and as I rarely visit anybody, I have no opportunity of meeting you casually in the houses of other people; but you can, if you like, gratify a solitary woman by letting her make your acquaintance in her own house; and perhaps when my son comes home on leave, the acquaintance, so begun, may ripen into friendship. I dare say people have told you that you are like him, and you will hardly wonder at my wishing to see more of a face that reminds me of my nearest and dearest.

"I am generally at home in the afternoon.

"Very truly yours,

"E. WORNOCK."

"E. Wornock!" he repeated, studying the signature. "Why no Christian name? And what is the name which that initial represents? Eliza, perhaps—and she sinks it, thinking it common and housemaidish—forgetting how Ben Jonson, by that housemaidish name, does designate the most glorious of queens. Possibly Ellen—a milk-and-waterish name, with less of dignity than Eliza; or Emily, my mother's name—graceful but somewhat colourless. I have never thought it good enough for so fine a character as my mother. She should have been Katherine or Margaret, Gertrude or Barbara, names that have a fulness of sound which implies fulness of meaning. I will call at Discombe Manor this afternoon. Delay would be to the last degree churlish—and I want to see what Geoffrey Wornock's home is like."

The afternoon was warm and sunny, and Allan made a leisurely circuit of the chase and park of Discombe on his way to Mrs. Wornock's house.

The beauty of the Manor consisted as much in the perfection of detail as in the grandeur of the mansion or the extent of gardens and park. The mansion was not strikingly architectural nor even strikingly picturesque. It was a sober old brick house, with a high, tiled roof, and level rows of windows—those of the upper story were the original lattices of 1664, the date of the house; but on the lower floors mullions and lattices had given place to long French windows, of a uniform unpicturesque flatness, opening on a broad gravel walk, beyond which the smooth-shaven grass sloped gently to the edge of a moat, for Mrs. Wornock's house was one of those moated manor-houses of which there are so few left in the south of England. The gardens surrounding that grave-looking Carolian house had attained the ideal of horticultural beauty under many generations of garden-lovers, the ideal of old-fashioned beauty, be it understood; the beauty of clipped hedges and sunk lawns, walls of ilex and of yew, solemn avenues of obelisk-shaped conifers, labyrinths, arches, temples and arcades of roses, tennis-lawns and bowling-greens, broad borders of old-fashioned perennials, clumps and masses of vivid colour, placed with art that seemed accidental wherever a spot of bright colour was wanted to relieve the verdant monotony.

If the gardens were perfect, the house, farm, and cottages were even more attractive in their arcadian grace. Quaint roofs and massive chimney-stacks, lattices, porches, sun-dials, of a day that is dead, gardens brimming over with flowers, trim pathways, shining panes, everywhere a spotless cleanliness, a wealth of foliage, an air

of prosperous fatness, bee-hives, poultry, cattle, all the signs and tokens of dependents for whom much is done, and whose dwellings flourish at somebody else's expense.

Allan noted the cottages which bore the Wornock "W" above the date of the building—he noted them but lost count of their number—keepers' lodges in the woodland which skirted the park—gardener's or dairymen's cottages at every park gate; farmhouse and bailiff's house; cottages for coachmen and helpers. At every available angle where gable, roof, and quaint old chimney-stack could make a picturesque feature in the landscape, a cottage had been placed, and the number of these ideal dwellings suggested territorial importance in a manner more obvious than any effect made by the mere extent of acreage, a thing that is talked about but not seen. Discombe Chase, the Discombe lodges, and the village and school-houses of Discombe were obvious facts which impressed the stranger.

That sweetly pensive face of Mrs. Wornock's had slain the viper envy in Allan's breast. When first he rode through those woods and over those undulating pastures and by those gables embowered in roses and wisteria, or starred with the pale blue clematis, he had felt a certain sour discontent with his own good fortune, about which people, from his mother down to the acquaintance of yesterday, prattled and prosed so officiously. He was sick of hearing himself called a lucky fellow. Luck, forsooth! what was his luck compared with Geoffrey Wornock's? That a bachelor uncle of his, having scraped together a modest little fortune, and not being able to carry it with him to the nether-world, should have passed it on to him, Allan, was not such a strange event as to warrant the running commentary of congratulation that had assailed his ear ever since he came to Matcham. No one congratulated Geoffrey Wornock. Nobody talked of *his* good luck. He had been born in the purple, and people spoke of him as of one having a divine right to the best things that this earth can give—to a Carolian mansion, and chase and park, and wide-spreading farms. There seemed to Allan Carew's self-consciousness an implied disparagement of himself in the tone which Matcham people took about Geoffrey Wornock. They in a manner congratulated him on his likeness to the lord of Discombe Manor, and insinuated that he ought to be proud of himself because of this resemblance to the local magnate.

To-day, however, Allan forgot all those infinitesimal vexations which in the beginning of his residence at Matcham had made the

name of Wornock odious to him. His thoughts were full of that pale sad face, the wasted cheeks, the heavy eyelids, the somewhat sickly transparency of complexion, the large violet eyes, which lit up the whole face as with a light that is not of this world. It was the most spiritual countenance he had ever seen—the first face which had ever suggested to him the epithet ethereal.

He remembered what society had told him about Mrs. Wornock; her encouragement of spirit-rapping people and thought-reading people, and every phase of modern supernaturalism; her passion for music—a passion so absorbing as almost to pass the border-line of sanity; at least in the opinion of the commonplace sane. He wondered no longer that such a woman had held herself aloof from the hunting, and shooting, and dinner-giving, and tea-drinking population scattered within a radius of eight or ten miles of Discombe; the people with whom, had she lived the conventional life of the conventional rural lady, she should have been on intimate terms. She was among them, but not of them, Allan told himself.

"Surely I am not in love with a woman old enough to be my mother!" he thought, between jest and earnest, as he drove up to the house. "I have not thought so persistently of any woman since the dean's pretty daughter, fairest and last of my calf-loves."

He was not wholly in jest, for during the last three days the lady's image had haunted him with an insistency that bordered on "possession." It was as if those dark grey eyes had cast a spell upon him, and as if he must needs wait until the enchantress who held him in her mystic bands should deign unweave her mystery and set his thoughts at liberty.

The hall door stood open to the summer air and the afternoon sun. A large black poodle, with an air of ineffable wisdom, was stretched near the threshold; a liver-and-white St. Bernard sunned his hairy bulk upon the grass in front of the steps; and on the broad terrace to the right of the house a peacock spread the rainbow splendour of his tail, and strutted in stately slowness towards the sun.

"House and garden belong to fairyland," thought Allan. "The enchantress has but to wave her wand and fix the picture for a century. We may have extended the limit of human life a hundred years hence, and Mrs. Wornock's age may count as girlhood, when some gay young prince of fifty-five shall ride through the tangled woodland to awaken the sleeper. Who can tell? 'We know what we are, but we know not what we may be.'"

CHAPTER IV.

"IN THE ALL-GOLDEN AFTERNOON."

THE hall door stood wide open to the sunlight, sufficiently guarded by that splendid brute, the St. Bernard.

A middle-aged footman in the sober Wornock livery came at the sound of the bell, the St. Bernard watching the visitor with grave but friendly eyes, and evidently perfectly aware of his respectability.

Mrs. Wornock was at home. The servant led the way to a corridor which opened out of the hall, and at the end of this corridor, like Vandyke's famous portrait of Charles the First at Warwick Castle, the full-length portrait of a young man in a hunting-coat looked Allan Carew in the face.

In spite of all he had been told about his likeness to the owner of Discombe, the sight of that frank young face looking at him under the bright white light fairly startled him. For the moment it seemed to him as if he had seen his own reflection in a cheval-glass; but as he drew nearer the canvas the likeness lessened, the difference in the features came out, and he saw that the resemblance was less a likeness than a reminiscence. Distance was needed to make the illusion, and he could understand now why his new friends of the hunting-field should have taken him for Wornock on that first morning when he rode up to them as a stranger.

The portrait was by Millais, painted with as much *brio* and vigour as the better-known picture of the young Marchioness of Huntley. Mr. Wornock was standing in an old stone doorway, leaning in an easy attitude against the deep arch of the door, hunting-crop, cigar-case, and hat on a table in the background, standing where he had stood on many a winter morning, waiting for his horse.

There was a skylight over this end of the corridor, and the portrait of the master of the house shone out brilliantly under the clear top-light.

The footman stopped within a few paces of the portrait, opened a low, old-fashioned door, and ushered Mr. Carew into a spacious room, at the further end of which a lady was sitting by an open window, beyond which he saw the long vista of an Italian garden, a cypress avenue, where statues were gleaming here and there in

the sunshine. There was a grand piano on one side of the room, an organ on the other; books filled every recess. This spacious apartment was evidently music-room and library rather than drawing-room, and here, amidst books and music, lived the lonely lady of the house.

She came to meet him with a friendly smile as he advanced into the room, holding out her hand.

"It was very good of you to come so soon," she said, in her low, musical voice. "I wanted so much to see you—know you. Yes, you are very like him. One of those accidental likenesses which are so common, and yet seem so strange. My husband had a friend who was murdered because he was like Sir Robert Peel; but my son is not a public man, and he has no enemies. You will run no risks on account of your likeness to him."

"I am grateful to the likeness which has given me the honour of knowing Mrs. Wornock," said Allan, taking the seat to which she motioned him, as she resumed her low chair by the window.

"Indeed, you have no reason. I am a very stupid person. I go nowhere, I see very few people; and the people I do see are people whom you would think unworthy of your interest."

"Not if you are interested in them. They cannot be unworthy."

'Oh, I am easily interested! I like strange people. I like to believe strange things. Your friend, Mrs. Mornington, will tell you that I am a foolish person."

"You have seen Mrs. Mornington lately?" questioned Allan.

"Yes; she was here yesterday afternoon. She is always bright and amusing, and I always feel particularly stupid in her society. She talked of you, but I did not tell her I wanted to make your acquaintance. She would have offered to make a luncheon-party for me to meet you—or something dreadful of that kind."

"You have a great dislike to society, Mrs. Wornock?" he asked, keenly interested.

Her manner was so fresh and simple, almost childlike in its confiding candour, and her appearance was no less interesting than her manner. It is the fashion of our day for women of five and forty to look young, even to girlishness; but most women of five and forty are considerably indebted to modern art for that advantage. Here there was no art. The pale, clear fairness of the complexion owed nothing to the perfumer's palette. No *poudre des fées* blanched the delicate brow; no *rose d'amour* flushed the cheek; no *eau de Medée* brightened the large violet eyes. The lines which

thought and sorrow had drawn upon the fair brow were undisguised, and in the soft, pale gold of the hair there were threads of silver. The youthfulness of the face was in its colouring and expression—the complexion so delicately fair, the countenance so trustful and pleading. It was the countenance of a woman to whom the conventionalities and jargon of modern life were utterly unknown.

"You saw my son's portrait in the corridor?" said Mrs. Wornock.

"Yes. It struck my untutored eye as a very fine picture—almost as powerful as the Gladstone and the Salisbury, which I remember in the Millais collection at the Grosvenor."

"But as for the likeness to yourself, now—did that strike you as forcibly as it has struck other people?"

"I confess that as I stood in the hall I was inclined to exclaim, 'That is I or my brother!' But as I came nearer the picture I saw there was considerable diversity. To begin with, your son is much handsomer than I."

"The drawing of his features may be more correct, but you are quite handsome enough," she answered, with her pretty friendly air, as if she had been his aunt. "And your face is more strongly marked than his, just as your voice is stronger and deeper," she added, with a sigh.

"Your son is not an invalid, I hope?"

"An invalid! No. But he is not very strong. He could not play football. He hated even cricket. He is passionately fond of horses, and an ardent sportsman; but he can be sadly idle. He likes to lie about in the sunshine, reading or dreaming. I fear he is a dreamer, like his mother."

"He is not like you, in person."

"No."

"He is like his father, no doubt."

"You will see his father's picture, and you can judge for yourself. Well, we are to be friends, are we not, Mr. Carew? And you will come to see me sometimes; and if you ever have any little troubles which can be lightened by a woman's sympathy, you will come and confide them to me, I hope."

"It will be very sweet to be allowed to confide in so kind a friend," said Allan.

"My son will be home for his long leave before the end of the year, and I want you to make him your friend. He is very amiable," again with a suppressed sigh. "Come, now it is your turn to tell

me something about yourself. This room tells you all there is to be told about me."

"It tells me you are very fond of music."

"I live for it. Music has been my companion and consoler all my life."

"And I hope you will let me hear you play again some day."

"Again? Ah, I forgot! You were in the churchyard last Sunday while I was playing. Did you listen?"

"As long as you played. I was under the open window most of the time."

"You are fond of organ music?"

"As fond as an ignorant man may be. I know nothing of the subtleties of music. I have never been educated up to Wagner or Dvorak. I love the familiar voices—Mozart, Beethoven, Verdi, Gounod, Auber even, and I adore our English master of melody, Sullivan. Does that shock you?"

"Not at all. I will play his cantata for you some day. If you have nothing better to do with your time this afternoon, I should like to show you my garden."

"I shall be enchanted. I am enchanted already with that long straight walk, those walls of cypress and yew, that peacock sunning his emerald and sapphire yonder by the dial. In such a garden did Beatrice hide when Hero and her ladies talked of Benedick's passion; in such a garden did Jessica and Lorenzo loiter under the moonlight."

"I see you love your Shakespeare."

"As interpreted by Irving and Ellen Terry. The Lyceum was the school in which I learnt to love the bard. An Eton examination in Richard the Second only prejudiced me against him."

"Mr. Wornock was a great Shakespearian."

They were in the garden by this time—sauntering with slow footsteps along the level stretch of turf on one side of the broad gravel walk. At the end of the cypress avenue there was a semi-circular recess, shut in by a raised bank, and a wall of clipped yew, in which, at regular intervals, there were statues in dark green niches.

"Mr. Wornock brought the statues from Rome when he was a young man. The gardens were laid out by his grandfather nearly a century ago," explained Mrs. Wornock.

Allan noticed that she spoke of her husband generally as "Mr. Wornock."

That amphitheatre reminds me a little of the Boboli gardens," said Allan; "but there is a peacefulness about this solitude which no state garden can have."

Three peacocks were spreading their rainbow plumage on the long lawns between the house and the amphitheatre, and one less gorgeous but more ethereal, a bird of dazzling whiteness, was perched on an angle of the cypress wall.

The lady and her companion strolled to the end of the lawn, and crossed the amphitheatre to a stone temple, open on the side fronting the south-western sun, and spacious enough to accommodate a dozen people.

"If you had a garden-play, how delightfully this temple would serve for a central point in your stage," said Allan, admiringly.

"People have asked me to lend them the gardens for a play—'Twelfth Night,' or 'Much Ado about Nothing;' but I have always said no. I should hate to see a crowd in this dear old garden."

"Yet there are people who would think such a place as this created on purpose for garden-parties, and who would desire nothing better than a crowd of smart people."

Mrs. Wornock shuddered at the mention of smart people.

"A party of that kind would be misery for me," she said. "And now tell me about yourself, and your relations. Mrs. Mornington told me that your father and mother are both living, and that you inherited Beechhurst from your uncle. I remember seeing Admiral Darnleigh years and years ago, when everything at Discombe and at Matcham was new to me. It must be sad for your mother to lose you from her own home."

"My mother is not given to sadness," Allan answered, smiling. "She is the best and kindest of mothers, and I know she loves me as dearly as any son need desire; but she is quite resigned to my having my own home and my own interests. She would argue, perhaps, that were I to marry I must have a house of my own, and that my establishment at Beechhurst is only a little premature."

"You are very much attached to your mother?"

"Very much—and to my father."

"Your tone as you say those words tells me that your father is the dearer of the two."

"You have a quick ear for shades of meaning, Mrs. Wornock."

"Pray do not think me impertinent. I am not questioning you out of idle curiosity. If we are to be friends in the future, I must know and understand something of your life and your mind. But

perhaps I bore you—perhaps you think me both eccentric and impertinent."

"My dear Mrs. Wornock, I am deeply touched that you should offer to be my friend. Be assured I have no reserve, and am willing—possibly too willing—to talk of myself and my own people. I have no dark corners in my life. My history is all open country—an uninteresting landscape enough. But there is no difficult going—there are no bogs or risky bits over which the inquiring spirit need skim lightly. Your ear did not deceive you, just now. Fondly as I love my mother, I will freely confess that the bond that draws me to my father is the stronger bond. In the parrot jargon of the day, his is the more interesting 'personality.' He is a man of powerful intellect, whose mind has done nothing for the good of the world—who will die unhonoured and unremembered save in the narrow circle of his personal friends. There is one question I have asked myself about him ever since I was old enough to think—a question which I first asked myself when I began to read classics with him in my school vacations, and which I had not finished asking myself when his untiring help had enabled me to take a first-class in the Honour School. To me it has always been a mystery that a man of wide attainments and financial independence should have been utterly destitute of ambition. My father was a young man when he married; he is still in the prime of life; and for six and twenty years he has been content to vegetate in Suffolk, and has regarded his annual visit to London as more of an affliction than a relief. It is as if the hands of life's clock had stopped in the golden noon of youth. I have told myself again and again that my father's life must have been shadowed by some great sorrow before his marriage, young as he was when he married."

Mrs. Wornock listened intently, her head slightly bent, her clasped hands resting on her knee, her sensitive lips slightly parted.

"You say that your father married young," she said, after a brief silence, in which she seemed to be thinking over his words. "What do you call young in such a case?"

"My father was not three and twenty when he married—two years younger than I am at this present hour—and yet the idea of matrimony has never shaped itself in my mind. But you must not infer from anything I have said that my father's has been an unhappy marriage. On the contrary, he is devoted to my mother, and she to him. I cannot imagine a better assorted couple. Each

supplies the qualities wanting in the other. She is all movement, impulse, and spontaneousness. He is calm and meditative, with depths of thought and feeling which no one has sounded. They are perfectly happy as husband and wife. But there is a shade of melancholy that steals over my father in quiet, unoccupied hours, which indicates a sorrow or a disappointment in the past. I have taken it to mean an unhappy love-affair. I may be utterly wrong, and the shadow may be cast by a disappointed ambition. It is not unlikely that a man of powerful intellect and lymphatic temperament should feel that he had wasted opportunities, and failed in life. It is quite easy to imagine the ambition without the energy to achieve."

She made no comment upon this, but Allan could see in her eager countenance that she was intensely interested.

"Is your mother beautiful?" she asked, timidly.

It seemed a foolish and futile question; and it jarred upon that serious thought of his parents which had been inspired by her previous questioning. But, after all, it was a natural question for a woman to ask, and he smiled as he answered—

"No, my mother is not beautiful. I am not guilty of treason as a son if I confess that she is plain, since she herself would be the first to take offence at any sophistication of the truth. She has never set up for being other than she is. She has a fine countenance and a fine figure, straight as a dart, with a waist which a girl might acknowledge without a blush. She dresses with admirable taste, and always looks well, after her own fashion, exclusive of beautiful features or brilliant colouring. She is what women call stylish, and men distinguished. I am as proud as I am fond of her."

"Will she come to see you in your new home?"

"Most assuredly my mother will pay me a visit before the summer is over, and I shall be charmed to bring you and her together."

"And your father? Will not he come?"

"I don't know. He is very difficult to move. He is like the lichen on the old stone walls at home. He takes no particular interest in chairs and tables; he would care not a fig for my new surroundings. Besides, he saw Beechhurst years ago, as a visitor to his wife's brother. He has no curiosity to bring him here; and as for his son, he knows he has only to want me for me to be at his side."

After this there came a silence. Certainly Mrs. Wornock was

not gifted as a conversationalist. She sat looking straight before her at the long perspective of lawn and cypress, broad gravel walk, and narrow grass plots all verging to a point at which the old house rose square and grey, crowned with cupola and bell. The peacocks strutted slowly along the narrow lawn. The waters of a fountain flashed in the warm sunlight. It was a garden that recalled Tivoli, or that old grave garden of the Vatican, with its long level walks and prim flower-beds, in which the Holy Father takes his restricted airing. In the Vatican pleasure grounds there are peacocks and clipped hedges, and smooth greensward, and formal cypress avenues, and quaint arbours; but the hum of Rome, the echoes of the Papal Barrack, the rush of the Tiber are near, and not even in that antique garden can there be this summer silence, silence as profound as in the enchanted isle where it seemeth always afternoon.

"Tell me more about yourself, your childhood, your youth," Mrs. Wornock asked suddenly, with an air of agitated impatience which took Allan by surprise.

Mrs. Mornington had prepared him for a certain eccentricity in the lonely lady of Discombe, but the strangeness of her manner was even more than he had expected.

"There is very little to tell about my own life," he said. "I have lived at home for the most part, except when I was at Eton and Cambridge. My father helped me in all my studies. I never had any other tutor except at the University. My home life was of the quietest. Fendyke is twenty miles from Cambridge, but it seems at the end of the world. The single line of rail that leads to it comes to a full stop. The terminus stands in the midst of a Dutch landscape—level fields divided by shallow dykes, a river so straight that it might as well be a canal, water mills, pollarded willows, straight clean roads, and fine old Norman churches large enough for a city, no Sunday trains, and not many on lawful days. A neat little town, with decent shops, and comfortable inns, and a market which only awakens from a Pompeian slumber for an hour or two on Fridays. A land of rest and plenty, picturesque cottages and trim cottage gardens, an air of prosperity which I believe is real. So much for our town and surroundings. For the family mansion picture to yourself a long low house, built partly of brick and partly of wood, with chimney-stacks that contain brick enough for the building of respectable houses, and which have defied the gales sweeping down from the Ural mountains—there is nothing, mark

you, between Fendyke and the Urals—ever since Queen Elizabeth was young enough to pace a pavan."

"You must be fond of an old house like that."

"Yes, I am very fond of Fendyke. I even love the surrounding country, though I can but wish Nature had not ironed the landscape with her mammoth iron. She might have left us a few creases, a wrinkled meadow here and there."

"I have heard that people born in Norfolk and Suffolk have an innate antipathy to hills."

"That may be. Indeed, I have noticed in the East Anglians a kind of stubborn pride in the flatness of their soil. But I have not that perverted pride in ugliness, since I was not born in Suffolk.'

"Indeed!"

"No. My father lived in Sussex—at Hayward's Heath—at the time of his marriage, and for half a dozen years after my birth. Fendyke came to him from his maternal grandfather, who left the estate to his daughter and heiress, and to her son after her, who was to assume the name and arms of Carew when he succeeded to the property. My father's name was Beresford."

There was no reply—no further questioning on Mrs. Wornock's part—and for some minutes Allan abandoned himself to the dreamy silence of the scene, content to watch the peacocks on the lawn, and to listen to the splash of the fountains.

Then suddenly the silence surprised him, and he turned to look at his companion. Her head had fallen back against the wall of the summer-house, her eyes were closed, and her face was white as death. She was in a dead faint; and they were at least a quarter of a mile from the house.

The situation was awkward for Allan, though there was nothing in so simple a matter as a fainting-fit to surprise him. He knew that there are women who faint at the smallest provocation, in a crowded room, in the sunshine, at church, anywhere. Here the sunshine was perhaps to blame; that delicious pure sunlight in which he had been basking.

He gave a long Australian cooe, long enough and loud enough to have brought help in the wilderness, and assuredly calculated to attract some gardener at work within call. Then he bethought himself of the fountains, and ran to get some water in his hat.

At the first dash of water, Mrs. Wornock opened her eyes, with a little sobbing sigh, and looked at him as if wondering who and what he was.

"I knew he would have answered my prayer," she murmured brokenly, "spirit to spirit, ghost to ghost."

It seemed a worse kind of faint than Allan had supposed, for now her mind was wandering.

"I fear the sun was too warm for you," he said, standing before her in painful embarrassment, half expecting some indication of absolute lunacy.

"Yes, yes, it was the sun," she answered nervously. "The glare is so strong this afternoon; and this summer-house is shadeless. I must go back to the house. It was very foolish of me to faint. I am so sorry. I hope you won't consider me a very silly person."

"My dear Mrs. Wornock, I have never heard that a fainting-fit on a warm summer afternoon is a sign of silliness."

"No, it is a thing one cannot help, can one? But it must have been so unpleasant for you. Ah, here is one of the gardeners," as a man came hurrying towards her, with a scared countenance. "There is nothing the matter, Henry. I am quite well now, Mr. Carew, and I can walk back to the house. And so your father's original name was Beresford. Does he call himself Beresford-Carew?"

"Yes, in all important documents; but he is a man too careless of forms to trouble himself much about the first name; and it has fallen into disuse for the most part, Carew being the name of honour in our county. He is known at Fendyke and in the neighbourhood simply as Squire Carew. I sign myself Beresford-Carew sometimes, when I want to distinguish myself from the numerous clan of Carews in Devonshire, and elsewhere. Will you take my arm to go back to the house?"

"Yes," timidly and faintly, "I shall be very glad of your support."

She put her small white hand through his arm, and walked slowly and silently by his side. Returning consciousness had brought back very little colour to her face. It had still an almost unearthly pallor. She walked the whole distance without uttering a word. A faint sigh fluttered her lips two or three times during that slow promenade, and on her drooping lashes Allan saw the glitter of a tear. For some reason or other she was deeply moved; or it might be that her fainting-fits always took this emotional form. He saw her safely seated on her own sofa, with footman and maid in attendance upon her, before he took a brief adieu.

"You'll come and see me again, I hope," she said, with a faint smile, as she gave him her hand at parting.

"I shall be most happy," he murmured, doubtful within himself whether he would ever hazard a repetition of this agitating finale to an afternoon call. To be interrogated about himself and his surroundings, with an eager curiosity which was certainly startling, and then to find himself *tête-à-tête* with an unconscious fellow-creature was an ordeal that few young men would care to repeat.

When he described his visit next day to Mrs. Mornington, she only shrugged her shoulders and said decisively, "Hysteria! Too much money, too much leisure, and no respectable connections. If there is one woman I pity more than another that woman is Mrs. Wornock."

"If ever I call on her again it must be with you or with my mother," said Allan. "I won't face her alone."

Although he came to this decision about the lady, he found himself not the less disposed to dwell upon her image during the days and weeks that followed his afternoon at Discombe; and more than once he asked himself whether there might not be some more cogent reason for her fainting-fit than the sun's warmth or the sun's glare—whether that deep interest which she had evinced in all he could tell her of home and parents might not be founded on something more serious than an idle woman's idle curiosity.

Could it be that he had lighted upon some trace of that mystery in his father's past life—that mystery which, without tangible evidence, he had always imagined as the key-note to his father's character in later years? She had fainted immediately upon his telling her his father's former name. Was that a mere coincidence of time, or was the name the cause of the fainting-fit?

Lady Emily arrived on a visit to her son while he was pondering this unanswerable question about Mrs. Wornock, and he caught at the opportunity. He hardly allowed his mother time to inspect his house and gardens, and the small farm which supplied his larder, and to give her opinion upon the furnishing of the rooms and the arrangement of the flower-beds and lawns, before he suggested taking her to call upon his neighbour at Discombe.

"But why, Allan? why should I call upon this Mrs. Wornock, when I am a stranger in the land?" argued his mother. "If there is any question of calling, it is Mrs. Wornock who must call upon me."

"Ah, but this lady is an exception to all rules, mother. She calls upon hardly anybody, and she has begged me to go and see her, and I feel a kind of hesitation in going alone—a second time."

He stopped in sudden embarrassment. He did not wish to tell his mother about the fainting-fit, though he had described the scene freely to Mrs. Mornington. He had thought more seriously of the circumstance since that conversation with Mrs. Mornington, and he was inclined to attach more importance to it now than at that time.

"I think you would be interested in Mrs. Wornock, mother," he urged, after a pause, during which Lady Emily had been pacing the room from window to wall with the idea of suggesting a bay to be thrown out where there was now only a flat French casement.

"Allan, you alarm me. I think you must be in love with this eccentric widow. You told me she was very rich, didn't you? It might not be a bad match for you."

"Perhaps not, if Mrs. Wornock had any penchant for me; and if I wanted a wife old enough to be my mother. Do you know that the lady has a son as old as I am?"

He reddened at the thought of that son, whose likeness to Beresford Carew was startling enough to surprise Lady Emily, and might possibly occasion unpleasant suspicions. And yet accidental likenesses are so common in this world that it would be weak to be scared by such a resemblance.

Would he be wise in taking his mother to Discombe? Perhaps not. He had made up his mind to take her there, wisely or foolishly. He wanted to bring her plain common sense to bear upon Mrs. Wornock's fantastic disposition.

"My mother is the shrewdest woman I know," he told himself. "She will read Mrs. Wornock's character much better than I can."

Lady Emily was the soul of good nature, and was particularly free from the trammels of conventionality; so, when she found her son had the matter at heart, she waived all question of the caller and the called upon, and allowed Allan to drive her to Discombe on the afternoon after her arrival at Beechhurst; and the drive and the approach to the manor were very agreeable to her.

"You are really prettier hereabouts than we are in Suffolk," she said condescendingly; "but you have not our wide expanses of pasture, our open horizon. Those high downs have a cramping effect on your landscape—they narrow your outlook, and shut you

in too much. Your sunsets must be very poor, in a broken-up country like this."

The weather was more sultry than on Allan's previous visit. Summer had ripened, the roses were in bloom, and the last purple petal had fallen in the rhododendron jungle through which they drove to the Manor House.

Mrs. Wornock was at home. Vain for the footman to deny it even had he been so minded, for the deep-toned music of the organ was pealing along the corridor. The mighty chords which begin Beethoven's Funeral March for the Burial of a Hero crashed out, solemnly and slowly, as Lady Emily and her son approached the music-room; and when, at the opening of the door, the player stopped suddenly, the silence was more startling than the music had been.

Startling, too, to see the fragile form of the player, and the semi-transparent hands which had produced that volume of sound.

"I had no idea you were so fine a musician, Mrs. Wornock," Lady Emily said graciously, after the introduction had been got over, the lady of Discombe standing before her timidly in the broad sunlight from the open window, so fragile, so youthful-looking, so unlike the mistress of a great house, and the chief personage in a rustic parish. "My son was eloquent in your praise, but he forgot to tell me of your musical talent."

"I don't think I have much talent," answered Mrs. Wornock, hesitatingly. "I am very fond of music—that is all."

"There is a great deal in that ALL. I wish my love of music—and Allan knows I prefer a good concert to any other form of entertainment—would enable me to play as you do, for then I could take the place of the stupidest organist in England at our parish church."

Lady Emily was making conversation, seeing that Mrs. Wornock's lips were mute and dry, as if she were absolutely speechless from fright. A most extraordinary woman, thought Lady Emily; shy to a degree that bordered on lunacy.

The talk had all to be done by Allan and his mother, since Mrs. Wornock's share in it was hardly more than monosyllabic. She assented to everything they said—she contradicted herself over and over again about the weather, and about the distinguishing features of the surrounding country. She agreed with Lady Emily that the hills spoiled the landscape; she assented to Allan's protestation that the hills were the chief charm of the neighbourhood.

She rang for tea, and when the servants had brought tables and tray and tea-kettle, she sat as in a dream for ever so long before she became conscious that the things were there, and that she had a duty to perform. Then she filled the cups with tremulous hands, and allowed Allan to help her through the simplest details.

Her obvious distress strengthened Allan's suspicions. There must be some mystery behind all this embarrassment. Mrs. Wornock could hardly behave in this way to every stranger who called upon her. Of all women living no one was less calculated to inspire awe than Lady Emily Carew. Good humour was writ large upon her open countenance. The milk of human kindness gave softness to her speech. She was full of consideration for others.

Distracted by the music of the organ, Lady Emily had not even glanced at the Millais portrait which faced her as she walked along the corridor. It was, therefore, with unmixed astonishment that she observed a photograph on an easel conspicuous on a distant table—a photograph which she took to be the likeness of her son.

"I see you have given Mrs. Wornock your photo, Allan," she said. "That is more than you have done for me since you were at the University."

"Go and look at the photo, mother, and you will see I have not been so wanting in filial duty."

Lady Emily rose and went over to the table in the furthermost window.

"No, I see it is another face; but there is a wonderful look of you. Pray who is this nice-looking young man, Mrs. Wornock? I may call him nice-looking with a good grace, since he is not my son. His features are more refined than Allan's. The modelling of the face is more delicate."

"That is my son's portrait," answered Mrs. Wornock, "and it is thought a good likeness. He is like Mr. Carew, is he not? Almost startlingly like; but the resemblance is less striking in the picture than in the living face. It is in expression that the two faces are alike."

"I begin to understand why you are interested in my son," said Lady Emily, smiling down at the face on the easel. "The two young men might be brothers. Pray how old is this young gentleman?"

"He will be six and twenty in August."

"And Allan was twenty-five last May. And is Mr. Wornock an only son, like my Allan?"

"Yes. I have only him. When he is away, I am quite alone—except for my organ and piano. I try sometimes to think they are both alive."

"What a pity you have no daughter! A place like this looks as if it wanted a daughter. But you and I are in the same desolate condition. Allan is all I have—and my white farm."

"Mother, why not my white farm and Allan?" said her son laughingly. "If you knew more of my mother, Mrs. Wornock, if you knew her in Suffolk, you would be very likely to think the farm first and not second in her dear love. Perhaps you, too, are interested in farming."

Mrs. Wornock smiled a gentle negative, and gave a glance at the triple keyboard yonder, which was eloquent of meaning. A glance which seemed to ask, "Who could waste time upon cow-house and poultry-yard when all the master-spirits of harmony are offering their mysteries to the faithful student?"

"Well, mother, how do you like the mistress of Discombe?" asked Allan, as they drove homeward.

"She is very refined—rather graceful—dreadfully shy," answered his mother, musingly; "and I hope you won't be angry with me, Allan, if I add that she seems to me half an idiot."

"You saw her to-day at a disadvantage," said Allan, and then lapsed into meditative silence.

Had he not also seen this strange woman at a disadvantage when she fainted at the mention of his father's name—the name his father had borne in youth, not the name by which he was known now? Her fainting-fit might have had no significance in his eyes if it had not followed upon her eager questioning about his father. And whatever suspicions had been excited by that first visit were intensified by Mrs. Wornock's manner in the presence of Lady Emily. Such obvious embarrassment—a shyness so much more marked than that with which she had received him on his first visit—could hardly exist without a deeper cause than solitary habits or nervous temperament.

The likeness between Geoffrey Wornock and himself might have meant no more than the likeness between Mr. Drummond and Sir Robert Peel; but that likeness, taken in conjunction with Mrs. Wornock's extraordinary interest in his father, and most noticeable embarrassment in receiving his mother, might mean a great deal—might mean, indeed, that the cloud upon his father's life was the

shadow of a life-long remorse, the dark memory of sin and sorrow. It might be that within the years preceding his marriage George Beresford had been involved in a guilty intrigue with Mr. Wornock's young wife.

To believe this was to think very badly of this gentle creature who used the advantages of wealth and position with such modest restraint, whose only delight in life was in one of the most exalted of life's pleasures. To believe this was to think Mrs. Wornock a false and ungrateful wife to a generous husband; and it was to believe George Beresford a vulgar seducer.

If there is one fallacy to which the non-legal mind is more prone than another it is its belief in its power to estimate the value of circumstantial evidence. Allan Carew tried his father and Mrs. Wornock by the evidence of circumstances, and he found them guilty.

"My mother shall never cross that woman's threshold again!" he decided, angry with himself for having taken Lady Emily to Discombe.

CHAPTER V.

MORE NEW-COMERS.

ALLAN recalled the story which Mrs. Mornington had told him of Mr. Wornock's marriage, and the mysterious birth of his son and heir—mysterious in that it was a strange thing for an English gentleman with a fine estate to carry off his wife to a foreign country before the birth of her first child, and to remain an exile from home and property until his son was three years old. Mystery of some kind—a secret sorrow or a secret shame—must have been at the root of conduct so unusual; and might not that secret include the story of the young wife's sin?

Allan Carew had heard of husbands so beneficent as to forgive that sin which to the mind of the average man lies beyond reach of pardon; husbands who have taken back runaway wives, and set the fallen idol once again in the temple of home-life; husbands who, knowing themselves old, ugly, and unlovable, have palliated and pardoned the passionate impulses of undisciplined girlhood, the sin in which there has been more of romantic folly than of

profligate inclination; husbands who have asked themselves whether *they* were not the darker sinners in having possessed themselves of creatures so lovely and so frail, so unadapted for a passionless, workaday union with grey hairs and old age. It might be, Allan thought, that Mr. Wornock was one of these, and that he had conveyed his young wife away from the scene of her sin and the influence of her betrayer, and had hidden her shame and his dishonour in that quiet valley among the snow-peaks and the glaciers. But if Mrs. Wornock had so sinned in the early days of her married life there must be people at Matcham who would remember the lover's presence at Discombe, even although his real character had been undiscovered by the searching eyes of village censors.

Lady Emily went back to her husband and her farm after a week at Beechhurst—a pleasant and busy week, in which the mother's experience and good sense had been brought to bear upon all the details of the son's household and domestic possessions—plate and linen, glass and china, books and ornaments.

"If it were not for your smoking-room, or drawing-room, or whatever you may be pleased to call it, your house would be obviously Philistine," said Lady Emily; "but that is a really fine room, and there are some pretty things in it."

"Some pretty things? Yes, there are a few," answered Allan, laughing at her tone of patronage. "I was offered five hundred pounds for that piece of tapestry which hangs in front of the conservatory doors by a man who thinks himself a judge of such things. The room is full of treasures from the Summer Palace."

"My brother must have looted in a most audacious manner!"

"No, he bought the things afterwards—mostly from the French sailors, who were licensed to steal or destroy. I believe the bronzes, and porcelain, and ivories, and embroideries that the admiral bought for a few hundreds are worth as many thousands. But there they are, and I must be very hard up before I disturb them."

Allan called upon Mrs. Mornington the day after his mother's departure, and was lucky enough to find that lady at home and alone.

She was sitting in her verandah, sewing, with a large basket of plain work on the ground beside her, and her scissors and other implements on a wicker-table in front of her, with climbing roses for a background, and a sunny lawn, a sunk fence, and a paddock dotted with Jersey cows as an outlook.

"I'm at work for the Guild," she said, apologetically, after shaking hands with Allan, and she went on herring-boning a flannel waistcoat; a waistcoat of that stout flannel which is supposed to have a kind of affinity with the skin of the agricultural labourer, although it can be worn comfortably by no other class.

Allan knew nothing about the Guild, but was accustomed to see Mrs. Mornington's superfluous energy expending itself in some kind of needlework. He seated himself in the comfortable armchair to which she invited him, and prepared himself for a long talk.

Of course he could not begin at once upon the subject of Mrs. Wornock. That would have to be introduced casually. He talked about his mother, and her regret at not having been able to stay till the following week, when Mrs. Mornington was to give a small dance, to which Lady Emily and her son had been invited.

"She can't be as sorry as I am, or she'd have managed to stay," replied Mrs. Mornington, in her blunt style.

"She has my father to think of. She is never long away from him."

"Why don't he come too?"

"I hope to get him for a week or so before the summer is over. He promises to come and look at my surroundings; but he is very much of a recluse. He lives in his library."

"I dare say he will contrive to come when Philip and I are away on our August holiday. We always take a month on the Continent just to keep us in touch with the outside world, and to remind us that the earth doesn't end on the other side of Salisbury. Do you know why I am giving this dance?"

"I am sure it is from a conscientious motive—to pay your debts. I find that most ladies' hospitalities are founded upon a system of exchange and barter, 'cutlet for cutlet,' as Lady Londonderry called it."

"It is very rude of you to say that—as if women had no real hospitality! No, Mr. Carew, I owe no one anything in the dancing line, and I am not making one evening party pay for a whole year's dinners. I have known that done, I assure you. No, I am turning my house out of windows, and making poor Phil utterly miserable, for the sake of a certain young half-French niece of mine, who is coming to live in this neighbourhood with my brother Bob, her thoroughly English father."

"You mean General Vincent? Some one told me that he was related to you."

"Related? I should think he was related to me! He used to pull my hair—we wore long plaits in those days, don't you know—with a ferocity only possible in an elder brother. Poor dear old Bob! I am monstrously pleased at the idea of having him near me in our old age. He has been tossed and beaten about the world for the last thirty years, at home and abroad, and now he is to enjoy enforced leisure, and the noble income which our country bestows upon a retired lieutenant-general. He has a little money of his own, fortunately, and a little more from his wife; so he will be able to live comfortably at Marsh House—in a very quiet, unpretentious way, *bien entendu.*"

"He is a widower, I conclude?"

"Yes; his pretty French wife died fifteen years ago. He met her in Canada, but she was a Parisian *pur sang*, and of a very good family. She had gone to Montreal with her mother, to visit some relations—uncle, cousin, or what-not. It was a very happy marriage, and Suzette is a very charming girl. She is a Papist"—with a faint sigh—"which, of course, is a pity. But even in spite of that, she is a very sweet girl."

"Worthy that you should turn your house out of window in order to introduce her to the neighbourhood in the pleasantest possible manner," said Allan. "My greenhouse is only a bachelor's idea of glass, but any flowers there are shall be sent to add to your decorations—at least, if you don't despise such poor aid."

"How truly nice of you! Every flower will be useful. I want to make the rooms pretty, since nothing can make them spacious. Ah, if I had only the Manor House now—those noble rooms of which Mrs. Wornock makes so little use!"

Allan seized his opportunity.

"Mrs. Wornock is the most singular woman I ever met!" he exclaimed quickly, lest Mrs. Mornington should diverge to another subject. "I took my mother to call upon her——"

"Had she called upon Lady Emily?" asked Mrs. Mornington, surprised.

"No. It was altogether out of order, my mother told me; but I rather insisted upon her going to Discombe. I wanted her to see Mrs. Wornock; and I must say that lady's manner was calculated to excite wonder rather than admiration. I never saw a woman of mature years receive a visitor so awkwardly. Her shyness would have been remarkable in a bread-and-butter miss just escaped from the schoolroom."

"That is so like Mrs. Wornock. The ways of society are a foreign language to her. Had you taken her a German organist with long hair, or a spiritualist, or an esoteric Buddhist, she would have received him with open arms—she would have been *simpatica* to the highest degree, and would have impressed him with the idea of a sensitive nature and a temperament akin to genius, while I dare say Lady Emily thought her a fool."

"She certainly did not give the lady credit for superior intelligence."

"Of course not. She has not even average intelligence in the affairs of social life. She has lived all these years at Discombe —she might be in touch with some of the best people in the county —and she has learnt nothing, except to play the organ. I believe she has toiled at *that*," concluded Mrs. Mornington, contemptuously.

"I have half forgotten what you told me about her in the first instance. I think you spoke of a mystery in her early life."

"The only mystery was that old Wornock should have married her, and that he should have told us nothing about her belongings. Had she been a lady, we must have heard something about her people in the last five and twenty years; and yet there is a refinement about her which makes me think she could not have sprung from the gutter."

"The gutter! No, indeed! She has an air of exceptional refinement. I should take her to be the offspring of an effete race—a crystallization. In her early married life, when she and Mr. Wornock were living together at Discombe, she had friends, I presume. They must have had visitors occasionally—a house-party?"

"Not they. You must remember that it was not more than six months after Mr. Wornock brought his young wife home when he took her away again——"

"But in the interim," interrupted Allan, eagerly, "they must have had visitors in the house! He would be proud to exhibit his pretty young wife. There must have been men-friends of his coming and going during that time."

"I think not. He was a very dry chip; and I don't think he had made many friends in the forty years he had reigned at Discombe. I never heard of any one staying in the house, either at that time or previously. He was hospitable in a casual way to the neighbourhood while he was a bachelor—gave a hunt breakfast every winter, and a good many dinners—but he was not a man

to make friends. He was an ardent politician and an ardent Radical, and would have quarrelled with any one who wasn't of his way of thinking."

A blank here. No hint of a too-frequent visitor, of one figure standing out against the quiet background of home-life, of one person whose coming and going had been marked enough to attract attention.

Allan breathed more freely. It was no prurient curiosity which had led him to pry into the secrets of the past. He wanted to know the truth; yet it would have been agony to him to discover anything that would lessen his reverent admiration for his father, or his belief in his father's honour and high principle. Sitting idle in the sunshine beside Mrs. Mornington, he tried to think that there might be nothing more than eccentricity in Mrs. Wornock's conduct, no indication of a dark secret in her fainting-fit, or in her embarrassed manner during his mother's visit.

Mrs. Mornington went back to the subject of her dance—her niece, her brother, his income, his establishment, and the how much or how little he could afford to spend. She lamented the dearth of dancing men.

"Both my boys are away," she said, "Luke with his regiment in Burmah, Fred in London. *He* might run down for the evening if he liked; but you know what young men are. Well, perhaps you are more civilized than Frederick. He pretends to hate dancing-parties; yet when we spent a winter at Cannes, he was at a ball nearly every night. He despises my poor little dance."

"I am sure your little dance will be delightful."

"I hope it will not be dull. I am straining every nerve to make it a success. I shall have the house full of nice young people, and I shall have decent music. Only four men, but they will be very good men, and four will make quite enough noise in my poor little rooms."

Mrs. Mornington's poor little rooms included a drawing-room thirty feet long, opening into a spacious conservatory. There was a wide bay at the end of the room which would accommodate the grand piano and the four musicians. Allan had to make a tour of inspection with the mistress of the house before he left, and to express his approval of her arrangements.

"There will be a comfortable old-fashioned sit-down supper," she said finally. "I have asked a good many middle-aged people, and they will have to be fed."

CHAPTER VI.

LIKE THE MOTH TO THE FLAME.

A SMALL dance in a bright airy country house on a balmy summer evening is about as pleasant a form of entertainment as can be offered to the youthful mind not utterly satiated by metropolitan entertainments, by balls in Park Lane, where the flowers alone cost the price of an elderly spinster's annuity, Bachelors' balls, and Guards' balls, American balls in Carlton Gardens, patrician balls in grand old London houses, built in the days when rank was as much apart from the herd and the newly-rich as royalty; when rank and royalty moved hand-in-hand on a plateau of privilege and splendour as high above the commonalty as Madrid is above the sea.

Mateham, which gave itself the airs common to all village communities, pretended to make very light of Mrs. Mornington's dance; a summer dance, when everybody worth meeting was, or ought to be, in London. Happily for Mrs. Mornington, the inhabitants of Matcham were a stay-at-home race—who had neither money nor enterprise for much gadding. To go to Swanage or Budleigh Salterton for a month or so while the leaves were falling was the boldest flight that Matcham people cared about.

There was always so much to do at home—golf, tennis, shooting, hunting, falconry, fishing for the enthusiasts of rod and line, and one's garden and stable all the year round, needing the eye of master and mistress. Except for the absence of the great shipbuilder's family, at Hillerby Height, three miles on the other side of Salisbury, the circle of Matcham society was complete, and the answers to Mrs. Mornington's cards were all acceptances.

Allan went cheerfully enough to the party, but he did not go very early, and he had something of the feeling which most young men entertain, or affect, about dances, the feeling that he was sacrificing himself at the shrine of friendship. He danced well, and he did not dislike dancing—liked it, indeed, when blest with a good partner; but it is so rarely that a young man can escape the chances of partners that are not altogether good, and Allan felt very doubtful as to the dancing capacities of Matcham. Those healthy, out-of-door young women, who went to about half a dozen

dances in a year, would hardly waltz well enough to make waltzing anything but toil and weariness.

He approached the Grove in that state of placid indifference with which a man generally goes to meet his destiny. He looks back in after-time, and remembers that equable frame of mind, hoping nothing, expecting nothing, content with his lot in life, and in no wise eager to question or forestall fate—

> "Tu ne quæsieris, scire nefas, quem mihi, quem tibi,
> Finem di dederint."

The Grove was a long, low stuccoed house, built at the beginning of the century, a house spread over a considerable extent of ground. To-night—with lights and flowers, and all the doors and windows open to the summer gloom, and lace draperies where doors had been, and white-gowned girls moving to and fro, and the sound of a Strauss waltz mixing with the voices of the idlers sitting in the hall—Mrs. Mornington's house was as pretty as a fairy palace, and as much unlike itself in its workaday guise.

Mrs. Mornington, in black lace and diamonds, with a black ostrich fan, loomed with commanding bulk on the threshold of the dancing-room. She wanted no steward, no master of the ceremonies to help her. Alone she did it! Mr. Mornington walked about and pretended to be useful; but it was Mrs. Mornington who did everything. She received the guests, she introduced the few strange young men to the many local young ladies. As for the local young men, whom she had seen grow up from sailor suits and mud-pies to pink coats which marked them members of the South Sarum Hunt, her dominion over these was absolute. She drove them about with threatening movements of her large black fan. She would not allow them rest or respite, would not let them hang together in corners to discuss the hunters they were summering, or the hunters they were thinking of buying, or the probable changes in the management of the kennels, or any other subject dear to the minds of rustic youth.

"You have come here to dance, Billy Walcott, and not to talk of those wretched old screws of yours," said Mrs. Mornington. "You can have that all out in the saddle-room to-morrow when you are smoking with your grooms. Let me look at your programme, Sidney. Not half full, I declare. Now go over to Miss Rycroft this instant, and engage her for the next waltz."

"Come now, Mrs. Mornington, that's rather too rough on me.

A man mayn't marry his grandmother; and surely there's some kind of law to forbid his dancing with a woman who looks like his great-aunt."

"Sidney, love, to oblige me. The dear old thing has gone to the expense of a new frock—— "

"She might have bought a little more stuff while she was about it," murmured the youth.

"On purpose for my dance, and *somebody* must give her a waltz. Come, boys, who shall it be?"

"Let's go into the garden and toss up," said Sidney Heathfield; but the other youths protested that they were engaged for every dance, and Sidney, who had come late, and whose programme was only half full, had to submit.

"I'll do it, Mrs. Mornington," he said, with serio-comic resignation, "on condition you get me a dance with Miss Vincent afterwards."

"If I do, she will have to cheat somebody else. Her programme was full a quarter of an hour after she came into the room. My niece is a success."

Young Heathfield made his way to a distant bench, where an elderly young lady of expansive figure, set off by a pink-gauze frock, had been sitting for an hour and a half, smiling blandly upon her friends and acquaintance, with a growing sense of despair.

What had come over the young men of the present generation, when good dancers were allowed to sit partnerless and forlorn? It all came of the absence of men of standing and mature age at evening parties. Sensible men were so disgusted by the slang and boldness of chits just escaped from the schoolroom that they held themselves aloof, and ballrooms were given over to boys and girls, and to romping galops and kitchen lancers.

Here was one sensible boy at least, thought poor Miss Rycroft, as Sidney Heathfield, tall, slim, studiously correct, stood looking solemnly down upon her, asking for the next waltz. Little did Miss Rycroft dream of the pressure which had been put upon the youth by yonder matron, whose voice was now heard loud and lively on the other side of the lace curtains.

Mrs. Mornington was talking to Allan.

"How horribly late you are, Mr. Carew. You don't deserve to find one nice girl disengaged."

"Even if I don't, I know one nice woman with whom I would as

soon sit and talk common sense as dance with the prettiest girl in Matcham."

"If you mean me," said Mrs. Mornington, "there will be no common-sense talk for you and me to-night. I have all these young men to keep in order. Now, Billy," suddenly attacking Mr. Walcott, who was talking mysteriously to a bosom friend about some one or something that was seven off, with capped hocks, but a splendid lepper, "Billy, haven't I told you that you were here to dance, not to talk stables? There's Miss Forlander, the girl from Torquay, who plays golf so well, sitting like a statue next Mrs. Paddington Brown."

"Oh, Mrs. Mornington," groaned the youth, as he strolled off, "what a life you lead us! I hope you don't call this hospitality."

"Am I not at least to be introduced to Miss Vincent, the heroine of the evening?" asked Allan.

"The heroine of the evening is behaving very badly," said Mrs. Mornington. "I don't think I'll ever give a summer dance again. I wish it had rained cats and dogs. Look at the dancing-room, half empty. Those young people are all meandering about the garden, picking my finest roses, I dare say, just to pluck them to pieces in the game of 'he loves me, loves me not.'"

"What better use could be made of a garden and roses? As long as you have only the true lovers, and no Mephistopheles or Martha, your garden is another Eden. But I must insist upon being introduced to Miss Vincent before the evening is over."

"I will do my best," said Mrs. Mornington, and then in a lower voice she told him that she had ordered her niece to keep a late number open for his name. "She is a very nice girl, and I think you are a nice young man, and I should like you to know each other," concluded the lady with her bluff straightforwardness.

Mr. Mornington and an elderly stranger, with iron-grey hair and iron-grey moustache, came across the hall at this moment.

"Ah, here is my brother!" cried Mrs. Mornington. "Robert, I want to introduce Mr. Carew to you. He is a new neighbour, but a great favourite of mine."

Allan stopped in the hall for about a quarter of an hour talking to General Vincent and Mr. Mornington, and then he, too, was called to order by his hostess, and was marched into the dancing-room to be introduced to a Dresden-china young lady, pink and white and blue-eyed like Saxony porcelain, who had been brought by somebody, and who was a stranger in the land.

He waltzed with this young creature, who was pretty and daintily dressed, and who asked him various questions about Salisbury Cathedral and Stonehenge, evidently with the idea that she was adapting her conversation to the locality. When the dance was over, she refused his offer of an ice, and suggested a turn in the garden; so Allan found himself among the meanderers under the starlit sky; but there was no plucking of roses or murmuring of "Loves me not, loves me, loves me not," no thought of Gretchen's impassioned love-dream as the Dresden-china young lady and he promenaded solemnly up and down the broad gravel terrace in front of the open windows, still conversing sagely about Salisbury Cathedral and the decoration of the Chapter House.

While parading slowly up and down, Allan found his attention wandering every now and then from the young lady at his side to another young lady who passed and repassed with an elderly cavalier. A tall, slim young lady, with black hair and eyes, a pale brunette complexion, and an elegant simplicity of dress and *chevelure* which Allan at once recognized as Parisian. No English girl, he thought, ever had that air of being more plainly dressed than other girls, and yet more distinguished and fashionable. He had seen no frock like this girl's frock, but he felt assured that she was dressed in that Parisian fashion which is said to antedate London fashion by a twelvemonth.

She was in white from head to foot, and her gown was made of some dead-white fabric which combined the solidity of satin with the soft suppleness of gauze. The bodice was rather short-waisted, and the young lady wore a broad satin belt clasped with a diamond buckle, which flashed with many coloured gleams in the moonlight, as she passed to and fro; and whereas most young women at that time displayed a prodigious length of arm broken only by a narrow shoulder-strap, this young lady wore large puffed sleeves which recalled the portraits of Sir Thomas Lawrence. The large puffed sleeves became common enough a year later, but they were unknown when Mrs. Mornington gave her dance. The damsel's silky black hair was coiled with artistic simplicity at the back of the prettily shaped head, while a cloud of little careless curls clustered above the broad, intelligent forehead.

She was talking gaily with her companion, Colonel Fordingbridge, a retired engineer, settled for some fifteen years in the outskirts of Matcham, and an intimate friend of Mr. Mornington's. He was telling her about the neighbourhood, holding it up to contempt

and ridicule in a good-natured way which implied that, after all, it was the best neighbourhood in the world.

"It suits an old fellow like me," Allan heard him say; "plenty of sport of a mildish order. Huntin', fishin', shootin', hawkin', and golf."

"Hawking!" cried the young lady. "Do you really mean that? I thought there were no more hawks left in the world. Why, it sounds like the Middle Ages."

"Yes, and I'm afraid you'll say it looks like the Middle Ages when you see a flight on the hills near Matcham. The members of the Falconry Club in this neighbourhood are not all boys."

"But the hawks!" exclaimed she. "Where—where can one see them?"

"Have you really hawks?" inquired Allan's young lady, who had exhausted Salisbury Cathedral, and caught eagerly at another local subject. "How utterly delightful! Do you go out with them very often?"

"I blush to admit that I have not even seen them, though I know there are such birds kept in the neighbourhood. I have even been invited to become a member of the society, and am seriously thinking about offering myself for election."

Seriously thinking since two minutes ago, be it understood, for until he caught that speech from the unknown young lady he had hardly given the hawks a thought.

She and her companion had disappeared when he and his porcelain lady turned at the end of the terrace.

"Do you know that girl who was talking about the hawks?" he asked.

"Yes, I have been introduced to her. She is the girl of the house."

"I am afraid you are missing a dance," said Allan, with grave concern. "We had better go in, had we not?"

"Yes, I fear I am behaving badly to somebody; but it is so much nicer here than in those hot rooms."

"Infinitely preferable; but one has a duty to one's neighbour."

They met a youth in quest of the porcelain girl.

"Oh, Miss Mercer, how could you desert me so long? Our waltz is half over!"

Allan breathed more freely, having handed over Miss Mercer. He made his way quickly to the hall where Mrs. Mornington was still on guard, receiving the latest comers, sending the first batch into the supper-room, and dictating to everybody.

"I shall not leave your elbow till you have introduced me to Miss Vincent," he said, planting himself near his hostess.

"If you don't take care, you will have to give me some supper," replied she, "I am beginning to feel sinking. And I think it would be a good plan for me to sup early in order to see that things are as they should be."

Allan's heart also began to sink. He knew what it meant to take a matron in to supper; the leisurely discussion of salmon and cutlets, the half-bottle of champagne, the gossip, lasting half an hour at the least. And while he was ministering to Mrs. Mornington what chance would he have of becoming acquainted with Mrs. Mornington's niece?

"I should be proud to be so honoured; but think how many persons of greater age and dignity you will offend. Colonel Fordingbridge, for instance, such an old friend."

"Colonel Fordingbridge has just gone in with my niece."

"Oh, in that case, let me have the honour," exclaimed Allan eagerly, almost dragging Mrs. Mornington towards the supper-room. "I should not like to have offended dear old Fordingbridge."

"We may get seats at their table, perhaps. I told Suzette to go to one of the cosy little tables at the end of the room."

Suzette! what a coquettish, enchanting name! He pushed past the long table where two rows of people were talking, laughing, gobbling as if they never dined, and had hardly tasted food for a week. He pushed on to the end of the room where, on each side of the fireplace, now a mass of golden lilies and palms, Mrs. Mornington had found space for a small round table—a table which just held four people snugly, if not commodiously.

One table had been made to accommodate six, the other had just been left by the first batch of supper-eaters. Miss Vincent and Colonel Fordingbridge were standing near while a servant re-arranged the table.

"That's lucky," said Mrs. Mornington. "Suzette, I want to introduce my friend Mr. Carew to you—Mr. Carew—Miss Vincent. And after supper he can take you to your father, whom I haven't seen for the last hour."

"I am afraid he has gone home," replied the young lady, after smilingly accepting the introduction. "I heard him ask Mrs. Fordingbridge to take care of me if he should feel tired and be obliged to go home. He can't bear being up late at night."

"No wonder, when he is out and about at daybreak!"

"The mornings are so nice," said Suzette.

"Yes, for people like you who can do without sleep; people who have quicksilver in their blood."

"One learns to be fond of the early morning in India," explained Suzette.

"Because every other part of the day is intolerable," said Colonel Fordingbridge.

They were seated by this time, and Mrs. Mornington was sipping her first glass of champagne with an air of supreme content, while Allan helped her to lobster mayonnaise. Suzette was on his other side; and even while ministering to the elder lady his looks and his thonghts were on the younger.

How pretty she was, and how interesting. It seemed to him that he had never cared for English beauty; the commonplace pinkness and whiteness, chubby cheeks, blunt noses, cherry lips. Those delicate features, that pale dark skin, those brilliant dark eyes and small white teeth flashing upon him now and then as she smiled, with the most bewitching mouth—a mouth that could express volumes in a smile, or by a pouting movement of the flexible lips. It was a face that seemed all movement and sparkle. Eyes and lips danced with the gaiety of the young glad heart.

Allan and she were good friends in about five minutes. He was qnestioning and she answering. Surely, surely she did not like India as well as England—a life of exile—a life under torrid skies? Surely, surely, yes. There were a hundred things that she loved in India; those three years of her life in the North-West Provinces had been years in fairyland.

"It must have been because you were worshipped," he said. "Yon lived upon adulation. I'm afraid when a young lady is fond of India, it means that she is not altogether innocent of vanity."

"It is very unkind of you to say that. How sorry you must feel when I tell you that the happiest half-year I spent in India was when father was road-making, and the only other officer in camp was a fat, married major—an immense major, as big as this table."

"And you were happy! How?"

"In all manner of ways; riding, rambling, botanizing, sketching, and looking after father."

"My niece is a Miss Crichton. She has all the accomplishments," said Mrs. Mornington.

"Oh, aunt! that is a dreadful character to give me. It means that I do nothing well."

Allan had asked her for a dance, and there had been an examination of her programme, which showed only one blank.

"Auntie told me to keep that waltz," she said. "I don't know why."

"I do. It was kept for me. I am the favoured one."

"But why?" she asked, naively. "Why you more than any one else?"

"Who can say? Will you call me vain if I tell you that I think I am a favourite with your aunt?"

She looked at him laughingly, with a glance that asked a question.

"You don't see any reason why I should be preferred," said Allan, interpreting her look; "but remember there never is any reason for such preferences. Clever women are full of prejudices."

He could perhaps imagine a reason which he would not have had Suzette know. Perhaps among all the available young men in Mrs. Mornington's circle he was the best placed, with an ample income in the present, and an estate that must be his in the future, the best placed of all except the young master of Discombe Manor; and the Lord of Discombe was away, while he, Allan, was on the spot.

The thought of Geoffrey Wornock suggested a question. They had left the little table to Mrs. Mornington and Colonel Fordingbridge, who were able to take care of each other. Allan and Miss Vincent were going to the dancing-room, not by the nearest way, but through a French window into the garden.

"Shall we take a little turn before we go back to the house?"

"I should like it of all things."

"And you are not afraid of catching cold?"

"On such a night as this? Why, in the hills I lived out-of-doors!"

"You have been at Matcham before, I suppose!"

"Yes, father and I stayed here with auntie once upon a time."

"Long ago?"

"Ages ago, when I wore short petticoats and wasn't allowed late dinner."

"Heartless tyranny!"

"Wasn't it? I didn't know what to do with myself in the long summer evenings. I used to go and look in at the dining-room window where they were all sitting at dessert, and auntie would wave me away, 'Go and play, child.' Play, indeed! Even the gardeners had gone home, and the dogs were shut up for the night. I was glad when it was nine o'clock and bedtime."

"Poor victim of middle-aged egotism."

"Dear auntie! She is so good! But people don't understand children. They forget what their own feelings were when they were little."

"Alas, yes! A child is as great a mystery to me to-day as if I had been born at one and twenty. I can't even understand or interest myself in a lad of fifteen. He seems such an incongruous, unnecessary creature, stupid, lumbering, in everybody's way. I can't realize the fact that he will ever get any better. He is there, complete in himself, a being of a race apart. I should feel insulted if any one were to tell me I had ever been like him."

"How true that is!" assented Suzette, gaily. "I have felt just the same about girls. I only began to wear my hair in a knot three years ago, and yet there seems hardly one point of union between me and a girl with her hair down her back. I have got beyond her, as somebody says. How sad that one should be always getting beyond things! Father detests India—talks only of the climate—while to me it was all enchantment. Perhaps if I were to go back to the East, a few years hence, I should hate it."

"Very likely. Going back is always a mistake."

There was nothing exalted or out of the common in their talk, but at least there was sympathy in it all, and they were telling each other their thoughts as freely as if they had been friends of long years. It was very different from being obliged to talk of Salisbury Cathedral, and theorize on the history of Stonehenge. And then there was the glamour of the garden and the moonlight; the mysterious light and shade of shrubbery walks; the blackness of the cedars that spread a deeper dark across the lawn. Mrs. Mornington had taken care to choose a night when the midsummer moon should be at the full, and she had abstained from cockneyfying the garden with artificial light, from those fairy lamps or Chinese lanterns which are well enough within the narrow limits of a suburban garden, but which could only vulgarize spacious grounds like these.

"I am glad you are almost a stranger to Matcham, Miss Vincent," said Allan, after the first brief pause in their talk.

"Why?"

"Because it is such a pleasure to meet some one who does not know Geoffrey Wornock."

"And pray who is Geoffrey Wornock?"

"Ah, how delightful, how refreshing it is to hear that! Miss

Vincent, I am your devoted friend from this moment. Your friend, did I say? I am your slave—command my allegiance in everything."

"Please be tranquil. What does it all mean?"

"Oh, forgive me! Know then that hitherto everybody I have met in this place has greeted me by an expression of surprise at my resemblance to one Geoffrey Wornock—happily now absent with his regiment in the East. Nobody has taken any interest in me except on the score of this likeness to the absent Wornock. My face has been criticized, my features descanted upon one by one in my hearing. I have been informed that it is in this or that feature, in this or that expression, that the likeness consists, while I naturally don't care twopence about the likeness, or about Wornock. And to meet some one who doesn't know my double, who will accept me for what I am individually!—oh, Miss Vincent, we ought to be friends. Say that we may be friends."

"Please don't rush on in such a headlong fashion. You talk like the girls at the convent, who wanted me to swear eternal friendship in the first half-hour; and perhaps turned out to be very disagreeable girls when one came to know them."

"I hope I shall not turn out disagreeable."

"I did not mean to be rude; but friendship is a serious thing. At present I have no friend except father, and two girls with whom I have kept up a correspondence since I left the Sacré Cœur. One lives at Bournemouth and the other in Paris, so our friendship is dependent on the post. I think we ought to go back to the dancing-room now. I have to report myself to Mrs. Fordingbridge, and not to keep her later than she may wish to stay."

Allan felt that he had been talking like a fool; that he had presumed on the young lady's unconventional manner. She had talked to him brightly and unrestrainedly; and he had been pushing and impertinent. The moonlight, the garden, the pleasure of talking to a bright vivacious girl had made him forget the respect due to the acquaintance of an hour.

He was silent on the way back to the ball-room, silent and abashed; but five minutes afterwards he was waltzing with Suzette, who was assuredly the best waltzer of all that evening's partners, and he felt that he was treading on air.

CHAPTER VII.

"O THE RARE SPRING-TIME!"

ALLAN called at the Grove two days after the dance—called at the friendly hour when there was a certainty of afternoon tea, if Mrs. Mornington were at home; and when he thought it likely that Miss Vincent would be with her aunt.

"She will almost live at the Grove," he thought, as he walked towards that comfortable mansion, which was nearly a mile from Beechhurst. "Marsh House is so near. There is a path across the meadows by which she can walk in dry weather. A girl living alone with her father will naturally turn to her aunt for companionship, will take counsel with her upon all household affairs, and will run in and out every day."

It was a disappointment, after having made up his mind in this way, to see no sign of Suzette's presence in the drawing-room at the Grove. Mrs. Mornington was sitting in the verandah with her inevitable work-basket, just as he had found her a fortnight before, when her brother's advent at Marsh House and the dance at the Grove were still in the future.

She received him with her accustomed cordiality, but she did not ask him what he thought of her niece, though he was dying to be questioned. An unwonted shyness prevented his beginning the subject. He sat meekly sustaining a conversation about the parish, the wrongs and rights of the last clerical squabble, till his patience could hold out no longer.

"I hope General Vincent likes Matcham," he said at last, not daring to touch nearer to the subject which absorbed his thoughts.

"Oh yes, *he* likes the place well enough. He has lived his life, and can amuse himself with his poultry-yard, and will potter about with the hounds now and then when the cub-hunting begins. But I don't know how it will suit *her*."

"You think Miss Vincent would prefer a livelier place?"

"Of course she would prefer it. The question is, will she put up with this? She has never lived in an English village, though she has lived in out-of-the-way places in India; but, then, that was camp life, adventure, the sort of thing a girl likes. Her father idolizes her, and has taken her about everywhere with him since she left

the Sacré Cœur at fourteen years of age. She has lived at Plymouth, at York, at Lucknow. She has had enough adulation to turn a wiser head than hers."

"And yet—so far as a man may venture to judge within the compass of an hour—I don't think her head has been turned," said Allan, growing bolder.

"That's as may be. She has a clever little way of seeming wiser than she is. The nuns gave her that wise air, I think. They have a wonderfully refining effect upon their pupils. Do you think her good-looking?"

"Good-looking is an odious epithet to apply to such a girl. She is exquisitely pretty."

"I'm glad you admire her. Yes, it is a dainty kind of prettiness, ain't it? Exquisite is far too strong a word; but I think she is a little superior to the common run of English girls."

"I hope she may be able to endure Matcham. After all, the country round is tolerably interesting."

"Oh, I believe she will put up with it for her father's sake, if he is happy here. Only no doubt she will miss the adulation."

"She must not be allowed to miss it. All the young men in the neighbourhood will be her worshippers."

Mrs. Mornington shrugged her shoulders, pursed up her lips, and made a long slashing cut in a breadth of substantial calico.

"The young men of the neighbourhood will hardly fill the gap," she said. "Yourself excepted, there is not an idea among them—that is to say, not an idea unconnected with sport. If a girl doesn't care to talk about hunting, shooting, or golf, there is no such thing as conversation for her in Matcham."

Before Allan could reply, the drawing-room door was thrown open, and Mrs. Mornington rose to receive a visitor. Her seat in the verandah commanded the drawing-room as well as the garden, and she was always on the alert for arrivals. Allan rose as quickly, expecting to see Miss Vincent.

"Mrs. Wornock," announced the youthful footman, with a grand air, perfectly cognizant of the lady's social importance.

To Allan the appearance of the lady of Discombe was as startling as if she had lived at the other end of England. And yet Mrs. Mornington had told him that she and Mrs. Wornock exchanged three or four visits in the course of the year.

Mrs. Mornington greeted her guest with cordiality, and the two women came out to the verandah together. They offered a striking,

contrast, and, as types of the sex, were at the opposite poles of woman, one of the world, worldly, large, strongly built, loud-voiced, resolute, commanding, a woman whose surplus power was accentuated by the petty sphere in which she lived; the other slender and youthful in figure, with a marked fragility of frame, pale, ethereal, and with a girlish shyness of manner, not wanting in mental power, perhaps, but likely to be thought inferior, from the lack of self-possession and self-esteem. All the social advantages which surrounded Mrs. Wornock of Discombe had been insufficient to give her the self-confidence which is commonly superabundant in the humblest matron who has passed her fortieth birthday.

She gave a little start of surprise at finding Allan in the verandah, but the smile with which she offered him her hand was one of pleasure. She took the seat which Mrs. Mornington offered her—the most comfortable chair in the verandah—and then began to apologize for having taken it.

"I'm afraid this is your chair——"

"No, no, no. Sit where you are, for goodness' sake!" cried Mrs. Mornington. "I never indulge myself with an easy-chair till my day's work is done. We are going to have our tea out here." The servants were bringing table and tray as she talked. "I'm very glad you came to see me this afternoon, for I dare say my niece will be running in presently—my brother Robert's daughter—and I want you to call upon her. I told you all about her the other day when I was at the Manor."

"Would she like me to call, do you think? Of course I will call, if you wish it; but I hardly think she will care."

"I know that she will care," replied Mrs. Mornington, busy at the tea-table. "She is not a great performer, but she is almost as enthusiastic about music as you are. She is a Roman, and those old Masses of which you are so fond mean more to her than they do to most of us."

Allan's spirits had risen with the expectation of Miss Vincent's appearance. He had been right in his conclusions, after all.

He resumed his seat, which was near enough to Mrs. Wornock's chair for confidential talk.

"You have quite deserted me, Mr. Carew," she said, with gentle reproachfulness. "I thought you would have been to see me before now."

"I did not want to seem intrusive."

"You could not seem or be intrusive. You are so much more to

me than a common friend. You remind me of the past—of my son. You would be almost as another son to me if you would let me think of you like that. If——"

She spoke quickly, almost passionately, and her low voice had a thrill of feeling in it which touched him deeply. What a strange impulsive creature this woman was, in spite of the timidity and reserve that had kept her aloof from that rural society over which she might have reigned as a queen.

Before Allan could reply to Mrs. Wornock's unfinished speech, there came a welcome diversion in the shape of a large black poodle, which rushed vehemently across the lawn, stood on end beside Mrs. Mornington's gown for a moment or two, sniffed the tea-table, wheeled round, and rushed off again in a diagonal line towards the point whence he had come.

This sudden black appearance was followed by an appearance in pale-lavender cambric, and the tall, slim form of a very elegant young woman, whose simple attire, as at the ball, bore the true Parisian stamp, that indescribable air of unlikeness to British dress, which is rather a negative than a positive quality.

The brilliant dark eyes flashed a smile upon Allan, as the young lady allowed him to take her hand *à l'Anglaise*, after she had spoken to her aunt and been introduced to Mrs. Wornock.

"Your poodle is a little too bad, Suzie. He nearly knocked me and the tea-table clean over."

"That is one of the aunt's innocent exaggerations," said Suzette, laughingly. "If you know her as well as I do, Mrs. Wornock, you must know that she always talks in a large way. Poor Caro. He is only a puppy; and I think, for a puppy, his manners are perfect."

Caro was crouching at her feet, breathing hard, for the space of half a minute as she spoke, and then he rushed off again, circling the lawn three or four times, with spasmodic halts by his mistress, or by the tea-table.

"He is rather a ridiculous dog at present," apologized Suzette, fondly watching these manœuvres; "but he is going to be very clever. He has begun to die for his queen, and he will do wonderful things when he is older. I have been warned not to teach him too much while he is a puppy, for fear of addling his brain."

"I don't believe he has any brain to be addled, or at least he must have addled it for himself with that absurd rushing about," said Mrs. Mornington, dealing out the tea-cups, which Allan meekly handed to the two ladies.

He had been to so many afternoon tea-parties of late that he felt as if handing cups and saucers and cream and sugar were a kind of speciality with him. In Suffolk he had never troubled about these things. His time had been taken up with shooting or fishing. He had allowed all social amenities to be performed by his mother, unaided by him. At Matcham he had become a new being, a person to be called upon and to return calls, with all the punctiliousness of a popular curate. He wondered at himself as he performed these novel duties.

Mrs. Wornock began to talk to Suzette, constrainedly at first, but the girl's frank vivacity soon put her at her ease, and then Allan joined in the conversation, and in a few minutes they were all three on the friendliest terms, although the elder lady gradually dropped out of the conversation, save for a word or two now and then when addressed by the other two. She seemed content to sit by and listen while those two talked, as much interested in them as they were interested in each other. She was quick to perceive Allan's subjugation, quick to understand that he was surrendering himself without a struggle to the fascination of a girl who was not quite as other girls, who had nothing hackneyed or conventional in person or manner.

After tea, they all went round the lawn, headed by Mrs. Mornington, to look at her roses and carnations, flowers which were her peculiar pride and care.

"If I had such a garden as yours—a day-dream in gardens—I don't suppose I should take any trouble about a few beds of dwarf-roses and picotees," she said to Mrs. Wornock; "but these flower-beds are all I have to console me for the Philistinism of my surroundings."

"Oh, but you have a really fine shrubbery," urged Allan, remembering that promenade of the other night among the lights and shadows, and the perfume of dewy conifers. "That belt of deodara and arbutus and rhododendrons, and this fine expanse of level lawn ought to satisfy any lady's ambition."

"No doubt. This garden of mine always reminds me of the Church catechism. It suggests that state of life to which it has pleased God to call me—an eminently respectable, upper middle-class garden, most detestably modern; while the grounds at Discombe carry one back three centuries, and one expects to meet fine gentlemen in ruffs and doublets, with roses on their shoes, and talking like that book whose name I forget, or abusing the new

and detestable custom of smoking tobacco. You will be in love with Mrs. Wornock's garden, Suzette, and will give up all idea of improving the Marsh House flower-beds."

"No, I shan't give up, however much I may admire," protested Suzette, sturdily. "If I had only a cottage garden, I would toil early and late to make it beautiful."

"There is plenty of room at Marsh House," said Mrs. Wornock, "and the garden is capable of improvement. When will you bring Miss Vincent to see me and my peacocks, Mrs. Mornington? Pray let it be soon. Your nicce and I have at least one taste in common, and I think we ought to be good friends. Will you come to luncheon to-morrow, you and Miss Vincent, and you, Mr. Carew, if you are all disengaged?"

"For my part, I would throw over any engagement that was capable of being evaded," said Mrs. Mornington, cheerily. And then in an undertone to Allan, she added, "It will be a new sensation to eat a meal at the Manor. This burst of hospitality is almost a miracle."

Allan acccpted the invitation unhesitatingly, and began to think Mrs. Wornock the most delightful of women, and to be angry with himself for ever having suspected evil in her past history. Whatever was strange in her conduct in relation to himself and to his father must be accounted for in some way that would be consonant with guilelessness and goodness.

That luncheon at Discombe Manor was the beginning of a new phase in Allan Carew's existence. All things must begin some day; and love—serious and earnest love—is one of the things which have their beginning, and whose beginning is sweeter than all the other first-fruits of life. It is not to be supposed that Allan was altogether a stranger to tender emotions, that he had come to five and twenty years of age without ever having fancied himself in love. He had had his boyish loves, and they had ended in disappointment. The blighting wind of satiety had swept across his budding loves before they had time to flower. All those youthful goddesses of his had shown him too soon and too plainly that there was very little of Olympian grandeur about them. As an only son with good prospects, he had been rudely awakened to the cruel truth that the average young lady has a sharp eye to the main chance, and that he, Allan Carew, was measured by his expectations rather than by his merits. Very early in his youth

he made up his mind that he would never let his heart go out to any woman who contemplated marriage from a business standpoint; and he had been keenly on the watch for the canker of worldliness among the flowers. Unluckily for his chances of matrimony, the prettiest girls he had met hitherto had been the most worldly; trained perhaps to worldliness on account of their marketable qualities. Much as he admired high-mindedness in woman, he was not high-minded enough to seek out virtue under an unattractive exterior; so he had almost made up his mind to follow his uncle's example, and go through life a bachelor.

As a bachelor he might count himself rich, and for a bachelor Beechhurst was an admirable dwelling-place. The house had been built for a bachelor. The rooms were spacious but few. Twice as many bedrooms, best and secondary, would be required for a family man. Thinking vaguely of the possibility of marriage, Allan had shuddered as he thought of an architect exploring that delightful upper floor, measuring walls, and tapping partitions, and discussing the best point at which to throw out a nursery wing, and where to add three or four servants' bedrooms.

And behold now this prudent, far-seeing young man, whose philosophy hitherto had been the philosophy of pure selfishness, was allowing himself to fall in love with a young lady who, for all he could tell, might be just as mercenary and worldly-minded as the girls he had met in Suffolk shooting-parties or in London ball-rooms. He had no reason to suppose her any better than they. Her father was a man of moderate means, and according to all the rules of modern life, it would be her duty to make a good marriage. He remembered how Mrs. Mornington had ordered her niece to save a dance for him, and he might conclude from that and other small facts that the aunt would favour him as a suitor for the niece. Yet the idea of worldly-mindedness never entered his thoughts in relation to Suzette. He abandoned himself to the charm of her delightful individuality without the faintest apprehension of future disillusion. He thought, indeed, but little of the future. The joys of the present were all-sufficing. To talk with her in unrestrained frivolity, glancing from theme to theme, but always with a grain of sentiment or philosophy in their talk; to walk beside her in those stately alleys at Discombe, or to linger in the marble temple; to follow the peacocks along the grass walks; to look for the nests of the thrushes and blackbirds in the thick walls of laurel; to plan garden-plays—Twelfth Night, Midsummer Night's Dream—in

that grassy amphitheatre, which reminded Allan of the Boboli Gardens—these things made a happiness that filled mind and heart to the exclusion of all thought of the future.

"I can understand the lilies better now than when I was first told to consider them," said Allan one day, as he stood with Suzette beside a great bed of lilium auratum.

"How do you mean?"

"Because I am as happy as they are, and take no more heed of the future than they do. I feel as they feel when they sway gently in the summer wind and bask in the summer sun, fed with the dews of night, having all things that are good for flowers, satisfied and happy."

"You are as foolish as I am. I can't help fancying sometimes that flowers are alive and can feel the sun and the glory of the blue sky. To be always looking up at the sky, dumb, lifeless, not knowing! One would hardly care for flowers if one could realize that they have neither sense nor feeling. Yet I suppose one does realize that cruel fact sometimes. I know when I have been looking at the roses, and delighting in their beauty, Caro meets me as I go back to the house, and as he leaps and frisks about me, the difference between him and the flowers strikes me very keenly. They so beautiful and so far off, he so near and dear—the precious living thing!"

"Ah, that is the crown of things, Miss Vincent—life! Dead loveliness is nothing in comparison!"

"No," said Suzette. "And what a blessing that life is beautiful in itself. One can love ugly people; one may adore an ugly dog; but who ever cared for an ugly chair, or could become attached to an ugly house?"

"Not knowingly; but I have known people fondly attached to the most hideously furnished rooms. And oh, how humiliating it is for middle-aged people like my mother to be obliged to admit that the things we think hideous were accounted beautiful when they were young!"

This easy, trivial talk was the growth of more than one luncheon, and a good many tea-drinkings, in the music-room or in the gardens of Discombe. Mrs. Wornock had opened her heart and her house to Suzette as she had never before done to any young lady in the neighbourhood, and Suzette warmly reciprocated the kindness of the recluse. She ran in at the Manor House almost as unceremoniously as she ran in at the Grove. It was understood by the

servants that their mistress was always at home to Miss Vincent. And as Allan had previously been made free of the Manor House, it was only natural that he and Suzette should meet very often under Mrs. Wornock's mild chaperonage.

Mrs. Mornington knew of these meetings, and, indeed, often dropped in while the young people were there, coming to take Suzette home in her pony-carriage, or to walk with her through the lanes. She showed no sign of disapproval; yet, as a woman of the world, it may have occurred to her that, since Mrs. Wornock was so fond of Suzette, it might be wise for Suzette to refrain from attaching herself to Allan Carew, while a superior *parti* remained in the background in the person of Mrs. Wornock's only son.

Happily for Allan, Mrs. Mornington, although essentially mundane, was not a schemer. She had made up her mind that Allan was a good deal better than the average young man, and that Beechhurst was quite good enough for her niece, whose possessions and expectations were of a very modest order. There had been no mock humility in Mrs. Mornington's statement of facts when she told Allan that her brother's income, from all sources, was just big enough to enable him to live respectably at Marsh House.

The foliage was beginning to show gleams of gold and red amidst the sombre green of late summer; the hounds were beginning to meet at seven o'clock in the crisper, clearer mornings of September; and Allan Carew was beginning to feel himself the bond-slave of a young lady about whose sentiments towards himself he was still entirely in the dark.

Did she care for him much, a little, not at all? Allan Carew was continually asking himself those questions, and there was no oracle to answer him; no oracle even in his inner consciousness, which told him nothing of Suzette's feelings. He knew that he loved her; but he could recall no word or look of hers which could assure him that she returned his love. It was certain that she liked him, and that his society was pleasant to her.

They had an infinite series of ideas in common—they thought alike upon most subjects; and she seemed no more to weary of his society than he of hers—yet there were times when he thought he might have been nearer winning her love had she liked him less. Her friendship seemed too frank ever to ripen into love. He would have liked to see her start and blush at his coming. She did neither; but received him with her airiest grace, and had always her

laughter ready for his poor jokes, her intellect on the alert for his serious speech about books or men. She was the most delightful companion he had ever known; but a sister could not have been more at her ease with him.

"I sometimes think you take me for one of your old convent friends," he said one day, when she had prattled to him of her housekeeping and her garden as they walked up and down the long grass alley, while the music of the organ came to them, now loud with the lessening distance, now sinking slowly to silence as they walked further from the house.

"Oh no; I should never take you for any one so patrician and distinguished as Laure de Beauvais, or Athenaïs de Laroche," she answered laughingly. "I should never dare to talk to them about eggs and butter, the obstinacy of a cook at twenty-five pounds a year, the ignorance of a gardener who is little better than a day labourer. But perhaps I am wrong to talk to you of these every-day cares. I will try to talk as I would to Athenaïs. I will dispute the merit of Lamartine's Byron as compared with Hugo's Ode to the King of Rome. I was for Hugo; Athenaïs for Lamartine. We used to have terrible battles. And now Athenaïs is married to a financier, and has a palace in the Parc Monceau, and gives balls to all Paris; and I am living with father in a shabby old house with three maids and a man-of-all-work."

"Talk to me as you like, he said; "talk to me as your serf, your slave."

And then, without a moment's pause in which to arrange his thoughts, surprised into a revelation which he had intended indefinitely to defer, he told her that he was in very truth her slave, and that he must be the most miserable of men if this avowal of his love touched no answering chord in her heart.

She who was habitually so gay grew suddenly grave almost to sadness, and looked at him with an expression which was half-frightened, half-reproachful.

"Oh, why do you talk like this?" she cried. "We have been such friends—so happy."

"Shall we be less friendly or less happy when we are lovers?"

That word "when" touched her keen sense of the ridiculous.

"When we are lovers!" she echoed, smiling at him. "You take everything for granted."

"I have no alternative between confidence and despair."

"Really, really, now? Am I really necessary to your happiness?"

"You are my happiness. I come here, or I go to the Grove, and find you, and I am happy. When I go away, I leave happiness behind me, except the reflected light of memory; except the dreams in which your image floats about me, in which I hear your voice, the sweet voice that is kinder in my dreams than it ever is in my waking hours."

"Surely I am never unkind."

"No; but in my dreams you are more than kind—you are my own and my love. You are what I hope you will be soon, Suzette—soon! Life's morning is so short. Let us spend it together."

They were in the temple at the end of the cypress walk, and in that semi-sacred solitude his arm had stolen round her waist, his lips were seeking hers, gently, yet with a force which it needed all her strength to oppose.

"No, no; you must not. I can promise nothing yet. I have had no time to think."

"No time! Oh, Suzette, you must have known for the last six weeks that I adore you."

"Indeed, I am not vain enough to imagine myself adored. I think I knew that you liked me—almost from the first——"

"Liked and admired you from the very first," interrupted Allan.

"My aunt said things—hinted and laughed, and was altogether absurd; but one's kinsfolk are so vain."

"Yes, when they have a goddess born among them."

"Oh, please don't be too ridiculous. You know that I like you; but, as for loving, I must have a long, long time to think about *that*."

"You shall think as long as you like; so long as you do not withdraw your friendship. I cannot live without you."

"Why should I cease to be your friend? Only promise that you will never again talk, or behave, as foolishly as you have done this afternoon."

"I promise, solemnly promise, until you give me leave to be foolish," he concluded, with a touch of tenderness.

He felt that he had been precipitate; that he might, by this temerity, have brought upon himself banishment from the Eden in which he was so happy. He had been over bold in thinking that the time which had sufficed for the growth of passionate love on his part was enough to make this charming girl as fond of him as he was of her. He was ashamed of his own arrogance. The

degrees of their merit were so different; she a being whom to know was to love; he a very commonplace young man.

Suzette was quite as easy in her manner with him after that little outbreak as she had been before. He had promised not to renew the attack, and in her simple truthfulness she believed all promises sacred between well-bred people.

Mrs. Mornington dropped in at teatime, ready to drive her niece home. It was a common thing now for Suzette to spend the whole day at Discombe, playing classical duets with Mrs. Wornock, or sitting quietly by her side reading or musing while she played the organ. The girl's religious feeling gave significance to that noble music of the old German and Italian masses which to other hearers were only music. The acquaintance between the elder woman and the younger had ripened by this time into a friendship which was not without affection.

"Mrs. Wornock is my second aunt, and Discombe is my second home," said Suzette, explaining the frequency of her visits.

"And the Grove, does not that count as home?" asked Mrs. Mornington, with an offended air.

"It is so much my home that I don't count it at all. It is more like home than Marsh House, both for father and for me."

Later, when the pony-carriage was taking aunt and niece along the road to Matcham, Suzette said suddenly, after a silence—

"Auntie, would it be a shock to your nerves if I were to tell you something that happened to-day."

"My nerves are very strong, Suzie. What kind of thing was it? and did it concern Mr. Carew *par exemple?*"

"How clever you are at guessing! Yes, it was Mr. Carew. He proposed to me."

"And of course you accepted him."

"Of course! Oh, auntie! what do you think I am made of? I have only known him about two months."

"What of that? If you had been brought up in the French fashion—and a very sensible fashion it is, to my thinking—you would have only seen him two or three times before you marched up to the altar with him. Surely you did not reject him?"

"I may not have said positively no; but I told him that it was much too soon—that I could not possibly love him after such a short acquaintance, and that, if we were to go on being friends, he must never speak of such a thing again."

"Never!"

"I think the word was never—or, at any rate, for a long, long, time. And he promised."

"He will keep his promise, no doubt. Well, Suzette, all I can say is that you must be very difficult to please. I don't believe there is another girl in Matcham who would have refused Allan Carew."

"What, are all the young ladies in Matcham so much alike that the same young man would suit them all? Have they no individuality?"

"They have individuality enough to know a good young man, with an excellent position in life, when they see one. I believe your father will be as disappointed as I am."

"Disappointed? Because I am not in a hurry to leave him. I don't know my father, if he is capable of such unkindness."

"Suzette, that little mind of yours is full to the brim of high-flown notions," retorted her aunt, impatiently.

"Dear auntie, surely you are not angry?"

"Yes, Suzie, I am angry, because I have a very high opinion of Allan Carew. I consider him a pearl among young men."

"Really, aunt! And if he were a poor curate, or a barrister without—what do you call them—briefs? Yes, briefs! Would he be a pearl then?"

"He would be just as good a young man, but not a husband for you. Don't expect romantic ideas from me, Suzette. If I ever was romantic, it was so many years ago that I have quite forgotten the sensation."

"And you cannot conjure back your youth in order to understand me," said her niece, musingly. "You are not like Mrs. Wornock, whose mind seems always dwelling upon the past."

"Has she talked to you of her youth?" Mrs. Mornington asked quickly.

"Not directly; but she has talked vaguely sometimes of feelings long dead and gone—of the dead whom she loved—her father whom she lost when she was seventeen, and whose spirit—as she thinks—holds communion with her in her long solitary daydreams at the organ. He was a musician, like herself, passionately fond of music."

"I hope you will not take up any of Mrs. Wornock's fads."

"Not unless you call music a fad."

"No, no, music is well enough, and I like you to practise and improve your playing. But I hope you will never allow yourself to believe in poor Mrs. Wornock's nonsense about spirit-rapping, and

communion with the dead. You must see that the poor woman is *toquée.*"

"I see that she is dreamy; and I am not carried away by her dreams. I think her the most interesting woman I ever met. Don't be jealous, auntie darling, I should never be as fond of her as I am of you."

"I hope not!"

"Only I can't help being interested in her. She is *simpatica.*"

"'Simpatica!' I hate the word. I never heard any one talked of as simpatica who hadn't a bee in her bonnet. I really don't know if your father ought to allow you to be so much at the Manor."

"I am going to take him to see Mrs. Wornock to-morrow afternoon. I know he will be in love with her."

"It would be a very good thing if he were to marry her, and make a sensible woman of her."

"Mrs. Wornock with a second husband! The idea is hateful. She would cease to interest me, if she were so commonplace as to marry. I prefer her infinitely with what you call her fads."

"'Crabbed age and youth cannot live together,'" said Mrs. Mornington, quoting one of the few poets with whom she had any acquaintance. "You and I would never think alike, I suppose, young woman. And so you refused Mr. Carew, and told him never to talk to you of love or wedlock, and you refused Beechhurst, yonder," pointing with her whip across the heath to where the white walls of Allan Carew's house smiled in the afternoon sunlight. "I know what your uncle Mornington will say when I tell him what a little fool you have been."

"Auntie, why is it you want me to marry Mr. Carew?" Suzette asked pleadingly. "Is it because he is rich? Is it for the sake of Beechhurst?"

"No, Miss Minx, it is because I believe him to be a good young man—a gentleman—and as true as steel."

Suzette gave a little sigh, and for a minute or so was dumb.

"Do you know why I have always been glad that my father is an Englishman?" she asked presently.

"Why, because he is an Englishman, I suppose. I should think any girl would be English if she could."

"No, auntie, I am not so proud of my father's country as all that. I have been glad of my English father because I knew that English girls are allowed to make their own choice in marriage."

"And a very pretty use you are going to make of your privileges,

refusing the best young man in the neighbourhood. If you were my daughter, I should be half inclined to send for one of those whipping ladies we read about, and have you brought to your senses that way?"

"No, you wouldn't, auntie. You wouldn't be unkind to daughter or to niece."

"Well, you have your father to account to. What will he say, I wonder?"

"Only that his Suzie is to do just as she likes. Do you know that I refused a young subaltern up at the Hills, a young man with an enormous fortune whom ever so many girls were trying to catch —girls and widows too—he might have had a large choice."

"And what did my brother say to that?"

"He only laughed, and told me that I knew my own value."

Mrs. Mornington was thoughtful for the rest of the way. Perhaps, after all, it was a good thing for a girl to be difficult to please. A girl as bright and as pretty as Suzette could afford to give herself airs. Allan would be sure to propose to her again; and then there was Geoffrey Wornock, who was expected home before Christmas. Who could tell if Geoffrey might not be as deeply smitten with this charming hybrid as Allan? and Discombe was to Beechhurst as sunlight unto moonlight, in extensiveness and value.

"And yet I would rather she should marry Carew," mused Mrs. Mornington. "I should be afraid of young Wornock."

CHAPTER VIII.

NOT YET.

ALLAN was dashed by Suzette's refusal to accept him on any other footing than that of friendship, and he was angry with himself for having spoken too soon. The only comfort left him was her willingness to consider him still her friend; and this was cold comfort, and in some wise more disheartening than if she had been more angry. Yet in his musings he could but think that she liked him better than a mere average acquaintance, and now and then there stole across his mind the flattering hope that she liked him better than she herself knew. He recalled all those happy hours they had spent together, with only Mrs. Wornock to make a third, Mrs.

Wornock who so often crept away to her beloved organ and left them to loiter in the gardens, or sit in one of the deeply recessed windows, quite alone, alone and talking in whispers, while the music filled the room, or straying far off in the stately pleasaunce, where their light laughter could not disturb the player.

They had talked together often enough and long enough to have explored each other's minds and imaginations, and they had found that about all great things they thought alike; while their differences of opinion about the trifles of life gave them subjects for mirthful argument, occasions for disagreeing only to end in agreement.

Suzette complained that Allan's university training made all argument unfair. How could she—an illogical, prejudiced woman, maintain her ground against a master of dialecties?

In all their companionship he could remember no moments of ennui, no indication upon the young lady's part that she could have been happier elsewhere than in his company. This was at least encouraging. The dual solitude seemed to have been as pleasant to her as it was to him. She had confided in him in the frankest fashion. She had told him story after story of her convent life; of her friends and chosen companions. She had talked to him as a girl might talk to a cousin whom she liked and trusted; and how often does such liking ripen into love; an attachment truer and more lasting than that hot-headed love at first sight, born of the pleasure of the eye, and taking shallowest root in the mind. Allan's musings ended in a determination to cultivate the friendship which had not been withheld from him, and to trust to time for the growth of love.

He was anxious to see Suzette as soon as possible after that premature avowal which had stirred the calm current of their companionship, lest she should have time to ponder upon his conduct, and to feel embarrassed at their next meeting. She had told him that she was going to the golf-links for practice before breakfast on the following morning; so at eight o'clock Allan made his appearance on the long stretch of rather rough common-land which bordered the Salisbury road half a mile from Beechhurst, and which was distinguished from other waste places by the little red flags of the golf club.

She was there, as fresh as the morning, in her blue-serge frock and sailor hat, attended by a small boy, and with the vicar's youngest daughter for her companion.

She blushed as they shook hands—blushed, and then distinctly

laughed; and the laugh, frank as it sounded, was the laugh of a triumphant coquette, for she was thinking of her aunt's indignation yesterday afternoon, and thinking how little it mattered her refusing a man who was so absolutely her slave. Propose to her again, forsooth? Why, of course he would propose to her again, and again, and again, as that foolish young subaltern had done at Simla. Were all men as foolish, Suzette wondered; and had all young women as much liberty of choice?

She glanced involuntarily at the vicar's youngest daughter, regarded by her family as the flower of the flock, but of a very humble degree in the floral world. A fresh-coloured, pudding-faced girl, with small eyes and a pug nose, but with a tall, well-developed figure of the order that is usually described as "fine."

The golf went on in a desultory way, Allan strolling after the players, and venturing a remark now and then, as suggested by a single summer's experience at St. Andrews. When the hour's practice was over, and it was time for the two young ladies to hasten home to their respective breakfast-tables, he accompanied them on their way, and after having left Miss Bessie Edgefield at the Vicarage gate he had Suzette all to himself for something under a quarter of a mile. They met Mrs. Mornington a little way from Marsh House, sallying out for her morning conference with butcher and fishmonger, the business of providing Mr. Mornington's dinner being too important to be left to the hazards of cook and shopkeeper. It was necessary that Mrs. Mornington's own eye should survey saddle or sirloin, and measure the thickness of turbot or sole.

She greeted the two young people with jovial heartiness, and rejoiced beyond measure at seeing them together. After all, perhaps Suzette had done well in refusing the first offer. The poor young man was evidently her slave.

"Or if Geoffrey should fall desperately in love with her," mused Mrs. Mornington, on her way to the village street, not quite heroic enough to put the owner of Discombe Manor altogether out of her calculations; "but, no, I shouldn't care about that. It would be too risky."

That which Mrs. Mornington would not care about was the mental tendency that Geoffrey might inherit from his mother, whom the strong-minded, clear-headed lady regarded as a visionary, if not a harmless lunatic. No! Geoffrey was clever, interesting, fascinating even; but he was not to be compared with Allan, whose calm common sense had won Mrs. Mornington's warmest liking.

After that morning on the links, and the friendly homeward walk, Allan felt more hopeful about Suzette; but he was not the less bent upon bringing to bear every influence which might help him to win her for his own, before any other suitor should come forward to dispute the prize with him. Happily for him, there were few eligible young men in the neighbourhood, and those few thought more of horses and guns than of girlhood and beauty.

Lady Emily had promised her son a visit in the autumn. Allan hoped that his father would accompany her. He wanted to bring Suzette into the narrow circle of his home life, to bring her nearer to himself by her liking for his mother and father. With this intent he urged on the promised visit, delighted at the thought that his mother's presence would enable him to receive Suzette as a guest in the house where he hoped she would some day be mistress.

He wrote to his father, reminding him of his assurance that he would not always remain a stranger to his son's home, and this letter of his, which dwelt earnestly upon certain unexplained reasons why he was especially anxious for his father's early presence at Beechhurst, was not without effect. The recluse consented to leave his library, which perhaps was no greater sacrifice on his part than Lady Emily made in leaving her white farm. Indeed, one of the inducements which Allan held out to his mother was the promise of a pair of white peacocks from Mrs. Wornock, finer and whiter than the birds at Fendyke.

Mr. Carew professed himself pleased with his son's surroundings.

"Your house is like the good man who bequeathed it to you," he said, after his tour of inspection; "essentially comfortable, solid, and commonplace. The admiral had a grand solidity of character; but even your mother will not deny that he was commonplace."

Lady Emily nodded a cheery assent. She always agreed with her husband on all points that did not touch the white farm. There her opinions were paramount, and she would not have submitted to dictation in so much as the ears of a rabbit.

"I could hardly forgive my brother for building such a house if he hadn't——"

"Left it to your son," interrupted her husband.

"No, George, that is not what I was going to say. I could not forgive his Philistine taste if he had not brought home all those delicious things from China, and built the Mandarin's room. That is the redeeming feature which makes the house worth having."

"Every one admits that it is a fine room," said Allan. "There is no such room in the neighbourhood, except at Discombe."

"Your father must see Discombe, Allan. We must introduce him to Mrs. Wornock."

"I think not, mother. He would be insufferably bored by a woman who believes in spirit-rapping, sees visions, and plays the organ for hours at a stretch."

His father looked at him intently.

"Who is this person?" he asked quickly.

"A rich widow, whose son is lord of the manor of Discombe, one of the most important places between here and Salisbury."

"And she believes in spiritualism. Curious in a lady living in the country. I thought that kind of thing had died out with Home, and the famous article in the *Cornhill Magazine*."

"We have had later prophets. Eglinton, for instance, with his materializations and his slate-writing. I don't think the spiritualistic idea is dead yet, in spite of the ridicule which the outside herd has cast upon it."

"I hope the widow lady is not beguiling you into sharing her delusions, Allan."

The son had seen a look in the father's face which spoke to him as plainly as any spoken words. That look had told him that his description of Mrs. Wornock conjured up some thrilling image in his father's mind. He saw that startled wondering look come and go, slowly fading out of the grave and gentle face, as the mind dismissed the thought which Allan's words had awakened. Surely it was not a guilty look which had troubled his father's mild countenance—rather a look of awakened interest, of eager questioning.

"I should hate to see Allan taking up any nonsense of that kind," said Lady Emily, with her practical air; "but really, if this Mrs. Wornock were not twenty years older than he, I should suspect him of being in love with her. She is a pretty, delicate-looking woman, with a shy, girlish manner, and looks ridiculously young to be the mother of a grown-up son."

"Oh, she has a grown-up son, has she?" asked Mr. Carew. "She belongs to this part of the country, I suppose, and is a woman of good family?"

He looked at his son; but, for some reason of his own, Allan parried the question.

"I know hardly anything about her, except that she is a very

fine musician, and that she has been particularly kind to me," he said.

"There, George," cried Lady Emily. "Didn't I tell you so? The foolish boy is half in love with her!"

"You will not say that after to-morrow, mother."

"Shall I not? But why?"

"You will lose all interest in to-morrow, if I tell you. Go on wondering, mother dear, till to-morrow, and to-morrow I will tell you a secret; but, remember, it is not to be talked about to any one in Matcham."

"Should I talk of a secret, Allan?"

"I don't know. I have an idea that secrets are the staple of tea-table talk in a village."

"Poor village! for how much it has to bear the blame; and yet people are worse gossips in Mayfair and Belgravia."

"Only because they have more to talk about."

Allan had arranged a luncheon-party for the following day. His courage had failed at the idea of a dinner: the lengthy ceremonial, the fear of failure if he demanded too much of his cook, the long blank space after dinner, with its possibility of ennui. Luncheon was a friendlier meal, and would less heavily tax the resources of a bachelor's establishment; and then there was the chance of being able to wander about the garden with Suzette after dinner, the hope of keeping her and her father till teatime, when the other people had gone home; though people do not disperse so speedily after a country luncheon as in town, and it might be that everybody would stop to tea. No matter, if he could steal away with Suzette to look at the single dahlias, in the west garden, fenced off from the lawn by a clipped laurel hedge, leaving Lady Emily and Mrs. Mornington to entertain his guests.

He had asked Mr. and Mrs. Mornington, General Vincent and his daughter, Mr. Edgefield, the Vicar and his daughter Bessie (Suzette's antagonist at golf), Mr. and Mrs. Roebuck, a youngish couple, who prided themselves on being essentially of the great world, towny, cosmopolitan, anything but rustic, and who insisted on talking exclusively of London and the Riviera to people who rarely left their native gardens and paddocks. Mr. Roebuck had been officiously civil to Allan, and he had felt constrained to invite him. The invitation was on Mrs. Mornington's principle of payment for value received.

Allan had invited Mrs. Wornock; he had even pressed her to be of the party, but she had refused.

"I don't care for society," she said. "I am out of my element among smart people."

"There will be very little smartness—only the Roebucks, and one may say of them as Beatrice said of Benedick, 'It is a wonder *they* will still be talking, for nobody minds *them*.' Seriously now, Mrs. Wornock, I should like you to meet my father."

"You are very kind, but you must excuse me. Don't think me rude or ungrateful."

"Ungrateful! Why, it is I who ask a favour."

"But I am grateful for your kindness in wishing to have me at your house. I will go there some day with Suzette, when you are quite alone, and you shall show me the Mandarin-room."

"That is too good of you. Mind, I shall exact the performance of that promise. You are very fond of Suzette, I think, Mrs. Wornock?"

"Yes, I am very fond of her. She is the only girl with whom I have ever felt in sympathy; just as you are the only young man, except my son, for whom I have ever cared."

"You link us together in your thoughts."

"I do, Allan," she answered gravely, "and I hoped to see you linked by-and-by in a life-long union."

"That is my own fondest hope," he said. "How did you discover my secret?"

"Your secret! My dear Allan, I have known that you were in love with Suzette almost from the first time I saw you together—yes, even that afternoon at the Grove."

"You were very sympathetic, very quick to read my thoughts. I own that I admired her immensely even at that early stage of our acquaintance."

"And admiration soon grew into love. It has been such happiness for me to watch the growth of that love—to see you two young creatures so trustful and so happy together, walking about that old garden yonder, which has seen so little of youth or of happiness. I felt almost as a mother might have felt watching the happiness of her son. Indeed, Allan, you have become to me almost as a second son."

"And you are becoming to me almost as a second mother," he said, bending down to kiss the slim white hand which lay languidly upon her open book.

Never till to-day had she called him Allan, never before had she spoken to him so freely of her regard for him.

"Allan," she repeated softly. "You don't mind my calling you by your Christian name?"

"Mind! I am flattered that you should so honour me."

"Allan," she repeated again, musingly, "why were you not called George, after your father?"

"Because Allan is an old family name on my mother's side of the house. Her father and grandfather were Allans."

He left her almost immediately, taking leave of her briefly, with a sudden revulsion of feeling. That question of hers, and the mention of his father's name, chilled and angered him, in the very moment when his heart had been moved by her sympathy and affection.

There was something in the familiar mention of his father's name that re-awakened those suspicions which he had never altogether banished from his mind. It was perhaps on this account that he had spoken bitterly of Mrs. Wornock when Lady Emily suggested that he should make her known to his father. That question about the name had seemed to him a fresh link in the chain of circumstantial evidence.

Suzette and her father were the first arrivals at Allan's luncheon-party. The General was a martinet in the matter of punctuality; and having taken what he called his *chota-haz'ri* at half-past six that morning, was by no means inclined to feel indulgently disposed towards dilatory arrivals, who should keep him waiting for his tiffin; nor could he be made to understand that a quarter to two always meant two o'clock. The Morningtons appeared at five minutes before two, the Vicar and his daughter as the clock struck the hour; and then there followed a quarter of an hour of obvious waiting, during which Allan showed Suzette the Chinese enamels and ivories, and the arsenal of terrible-looking swords and daggers displayed against the wall of the Mandarin-room, while the Morningtons were discussing with Lady Emily and her husband the merits of Matcham in particular and Wiltshire in general as compared with Suffolk.

This delay, at which General Vincent was righteously angry, was occasioned by the Roebucks, who sauntered in with a leisurely air at a quarter-past two; the wife on the best possible terms with herself and her new tailor gown; the husband puffed up at having

read his *Times* before any one else, and loquacious upon the merits of the "crushing reply" made last night by Lord Hatfield at Windermere to "the abominable farrago of lies" in Mr. Henry Wilkes's oration the night before last at Kendal.

"I dare say it was a very good speech," said the General, grimly; "but you might have kept it for after luncheon. It would have been less injured by waiting than Mr. Carew's joint; if he's going to give us one."

"Are we late?" exclaimed Mrs. Roebuck, who had endured a quarter of an hour's agony in front of her cheval glass before the new tailor bodice could be made to "come to." "Are we really late? How very naughty of us! Please, please don't be angry, good people. We beg everybody's pardon," clasping two tightly gloved hands with a prettily beseeching gesture.

"Don't mention it," said the General. "We all like waiting; but if Carew has got a mug cook, I won't give much for the state of her temper at this moment."

"We'll send a pretty message to the cook after luncheon, if she has been clever enough not to spoil her dishes."

The ladies—Lady Emily and Mrs. Mornington descanting on gardens and glass all the way—went in a bevy to the dining-room, the men following, Mr. Roebuck still quoting Lord Hatfield, and the way in which he had demolished the Radical orator.

"The worst of it is he don't make 'em laugh," said Mr. Mornington. "Nobody can make 'em laugh as Wilkes does. Town or country, hodge or mechanic, he knows the length of their foot to a fraction, and knows what will hit them and what will tickle them."

The cook was sufficiently "mug" to have been equal to the difficulties of twenty minutes' delay, and the luncheon was admirable—not too many courses, nor too many dishes, but everything perfect after its kind. Nor was the joint—that item dear to elderly gentlemen—forgotten, for after a first course of fish and a second of curry and *crême de volaille*, there appeared a saddle of Wiltshire mutton, to which the elderly gentlemen did ample justice, while the ladies, who had lunched upon the more sophisticated dishes, supplied the greater part of the conversation.

"My father will quote your cook for the next six months," said Suzette, by whose side Allan had contrived to place himself during the casual dropping into seats at the large round table, "for yours is the only house where he has seen Bombay ducks served with the curry."

"Did you not tell me onee that your father has a weakness for those absurd little fish?"

"Did I really? Was I capable of talking such absolute twaddle?"

"It was not twaddle. It was very serious. It was on a day when I found you looking worried and absent, unable to appreciate either Mrs. Wornock's music or my conversation; and, on being closely questioned, you confessed that the canker at your heart was dinner. The General had been dissatisfied; the cook was stupid. You had done your uttermost. You had devoted hours to the reading of cookery-books, which seemed all of them hopelessly alike. You had studied all his fancies. You had given him Bombay ducks with his curry——"

"Did I say all that? How silly of me. And how ridiculous of you to remember."

"Memory is not a paid servant, but a most capricious Ariel. One cannot say to one's self, I will remember this or that. My memory is far from a useful servant; but there is one thing in which it can be relied on. I remember everything about you —all you say to me, all you do—even to the gowns you wear."

Suzette laughed a little and blushed a little; but did not look offended.

"You had about five minutes' talk with my mother before I took you to see the enamels. How do you like her?"

"Immensely! Lady Emily is eharming. She was telling me about her white farm."

"It would have been odd if you had eseaped hearing of that, even in the first five minutes."

"I was deeply interested. Lady Emily has promised me some white bramahs. I am going to start a white poultry-yard. I cannot aspire higher than poultry; but I am determined that every bird shall be white."

"Pretty foolishness! And so you like my mother?"

"Very, very much. She is one of those people with whom one feels at one's ease from the first moment. She looks as if she could not say or even think anything unkind."

"I don't believe she could do either. And yet she is human—feminine-human—and can enjoy an interesting scandal—local, if possible. She enjoys it passively. She does nothing to swell the snowball, and will hardly help to roll it along. She remains

perfectly passive, and never goes further than to say that she is shocked and disappointed. And yet I believe she enjoys it."

"It is only the excitement that one enjoys. We had scandals even in the convent—girls who behaved badly, dishonourably, about their studies; cheating in order to get a better chance of a prize. I'm afraid we were all too deeply interested in the crime and the punishment. It was something to think about and talk about when life was particularly monotonous."

Lady Emily was watching them from the other side of the table, and lending rather an indifferent ear to Mr. Roebuck's account of Homburg and the people he and his wife had met there. They had only just returned from that exhilarating scene. He could talk of nothing but H.R.H.'s condescension; the dear duchess; Lady this, Lord the other; and the prodigious demand there had been for himself and his wife in the very smartest society.

"Four picnics a day are hardly conducive to the cure of suppressed gout," said Mr. Roebuck; "and there were ever so many days when we had to cut ourselves up into little bits—lunching with one party, taking coffee with another, driving home with somebody else, going to tea-fights all over the place. Dinner engagements I positively set my face against. Mimosa and I were there for rest and recuperation after the season—positively washed out, both of us. You have no idea what a rag my wife looked when we took our seats in the club train."

Happily for Lady Emily, who had been suffering this kind of thing for half an hour, the cake and the coffee had gone round, and at her first imploring glance Mrs. Mornington rose and the ladies left the dining-room. Yet even this relief was but temporary; for Mrs. Roebuck appropriated Lady Emily in the garden, and entertained her with her own view of Homburg, which was smarter, inasmuch as it was more exclusive than Mr. Roebuck's.

"A horrid place," said the lady. "One meets all one's London friends mixed up with a herd of foreign royalties whom one is expected to cultivate. I used to send Richard to all the gaieties, while I stopped at home and let my maid-companion read to me. We shall go to Marienbad next August. If one could be at Homburg without people knowing one was there, the place might be tolerable."

"I have been told the scenery is very fine," hazarded Lady Emily.

"Oh, the scenery is well enough; but one knows it, and one has

seen so much finer things in that way. When one has been across the Cordilleras, it is absurd to be asked to worship some poor little hills in Germany."

"I have seldom been out of Suffolk, except to visit some of my people in Scotland. Ben Lomond and Ben Nevis are quite big enough for me."

"Oh, the Scotch hills are dear things, with quite a character of their own; and a Scotch deer forest is the finest thing of its kind all over the world. The duke's is sixty thousand acres—and Dick and I always enjoy ourselves at Ultimathule Castle—but after being lost in a snowstorm in the Cordilleras——"

Lady Emily stifled a despairing yawn. Not a word had she been able to say about her Woodbastwick cows, which she was inwardly comparing with Allan's black muzzled Jerseys, grazing on the other side of the sunk fence. Heartfelt was her gratitude to Mrs. Mornington when that lady suddenly wheeled round from a confidential talk with the vicar and interrupted Mrs. Roebuck's journey across the Cordilleras by an inquiry about the Suffolk branches of the Guild for supplying warm and comfortable raiment to the deserving poor.

"I hope you have a branch at Millfield," she said.

"Yes, indeed we have. I am a slave to the Guild all the winter. One can't make flannel petticoats and things in summer, you know."

"*I* can," retorted Mrs. Mornington, decisively.

"What, on a broiling day in August! when the very sight of flannel puts one in a fever?"

"I am not so impressionable. The things are wanted in October, and July and August are quite late enough for getting them ready."

"I subscribe to these institutions," Mrs. Roebuck remarked languidly. "I never work for them. Life isn't long enough."

"Then you never have the right kind of feeling about your poorer fellow-creatures," said Mrs. Mornington. "It is the doing something for them, using one's own hand and eye and thought for the poor toiling creatures, sacrificing some little leisure and some little fad to making them more comfortable—it is that kind of thing which brings the idea of that harder world home to one."

"Ah, how nice it is of you dear ladies to sacrifice yourselves like that; but you couldn't do it after a June and July in London. If you had seen what a poor creature I looked when we took our seats in the club train for Homburg——"

Mrs. Mornington tucked her arm under Lady Emily's and walked her away.

"I want you to tell me all about your farm," she said. And then, in a rather loud aside, "I can't stand that woman, and I wish your son hadn't been so conscientious in asking her."

While emptiness and ennui prevailed on the terrace in front of the Mandarin-room, there were a pair of wanderers in the shrubbery, whose talk was unleavened by worldliness or pretence of any kind. Allan had stolen away from the smokers in the dining-room, and was escorting Suzette and her friend Bessie Edgefield round his modest domain—the shrubberies, the paddocks nearest the house, which had been planted and educated into a kind of park; the greenhouse and hothouse, which were just capacious enough to supply plenty of flowers for drawing-room and dinner-table, but not to grow grapes or peaches. Everything was on a modest, unassuming scale. Allan felt that after the mansion and gardens at Discombe, his house suggested the abode of a retired tradesman. A successful hosier or bootmaker might create for himself such a home. Soap, or lucifer matches, or cocoa would require something far more splendid.

Modest as the place was, the two girls admired, or seemed to admire, all its details—the conifers of thirty years' growth, the smiling meadows, the fawn-coloured cows. A sunny September afternoon showed those fertile pastures and trim gardens at their best. Allan felt exquisitely happy walking about those smooth lawns and gravel paths with the girl he loved. At every word of approval he fancied she was praising the place in which she would be content to live. After that avowal of his the other day, it seemed to him that her kindness meant much more than it had meant before she knew her power. She could not be so cruel as to mock him with the promise of her smiles, her sweet words, her undisguised pleasure in his company. Yes, he was perfectly happy. He thought of her refusal the other day as only the prelude to her acceptance. She had not said "No;" she had only said "Not yet."

Bessie Edgefield was one of those sweetly constituted girls whose very nature is to be a third party in a love affair; never to play the heroine in white satin, but always the confidante in white muslin. She walked beside her friend, placid, silent, save for an occasional monosyllable, and was of no more account than Suzette's shadow.

"The Roebucks are taking leave," exclaimed Suzette, looking across the lawn to the groups on the terrace. "Mr. Carew, I'm afraid you are a sadly inattentive host."

"Have I neglected you, Miss Vincent?"

"You have neglected Mrs. Roebuck, which is much worse. She will be talking of your want of *savoir vivre* all over Matcham."

"Let her talk. She has been boring my mother with a cruelty worthy of Torquemada. She forgets that torture was illegal in England even in Bacon's time. See, they are all going away; but you and the General and Miss Edgefield must stay to tea, even if the Vicar is too busy to stop.

The Vicar had quietly vanished, to resume the round of parish duties, quite content to leave his Bessie in comfortable quarters. The Roebucks were going, and the Morningtons were following their example; but General Vincent had no objection to stop to tea if his daughter and Miss Edgefield desired him to do so.

He was smoking a cheroot, comfortably seated in a sheltered part of the terrace—a corner facing south, screened from east and north by an angle of the house, where the Mandarin-room projected from the main building—and he was absorbed in a discussion of Indian legendary lore with Mr. Carew, who owned to some knowledge of sanscrit, and had made Eastern fable and legend an especial study.

Suzette and her father stayed till nearly seven o'clock, when Allan insisted on walking home with them, having suddenly discovered that he had had no walking that day. He had been cub-hunting from seven in the morning till nine; but he declared himself in need of walking exercise. Lady Emily went with them to the gate, and parted with Suzette as with a favourite of long standing. Allan was enraptured to see his mother's friendliness with the girl he loved; and it was all he could do to restrain his feelings during the walk to Marsh House.

Perhaps it was only that gay temper of hers, that readiness to laugh at him and at all things in creation, which held him at a distance. He had made up his mind that she was to be his—that if she were to refuse him twenty times in twenty capricious moods of her light and airy temperament, there was somewhere in her nature a vein of serious feeling, and by that he would win her and hold her.

"You like Miss Vincent, mother?" he asked that evening, when

he was sitting with his father and mother in the Mandarin-room after dinner.

The evening was warm to sultriness, and there were several casements open in the long window which filled one end of the room; a window with richly carved sashes and panels of cedar and lattice-work alternating with the glass. There was another window in the western wall, less elaborate—a door-window—which formed the usual exit to the garden. This was closed, but not curtained.

The large room was lighted only with shaded lamps, which lighted the tables and the spaces round them, but left the corners in shadow.

Lady Emily was sitting at one of the tables, her fingers occupied with a large piece of work, which she carried about with her wherever she went, and which, to the eye of the uninitiated, never appeared to make any progress towards completion. It was destined eventually to cover the grand piano at Fendyke, and it was to be something very rare and precious in the way of embroidery; the basis a collection of Breton shawl-pattern handkerchiefs, overlaid by Lady Emily with embroidery in many-coloured silks and Japanese gold thread. This piece of work was a devouring monster in the matter of silk, and Lady Emily was always telling her friends the number of skeins which were required for its maintenance, and the cost of the gold thread which made so faint an effect in the Oriental labyrinth of palms and sprigs and arabesques and medallions.

"I'm afraid I shall never live to finish it," Lady Emily would conclude with a sigh, throwing herself back in her chair after an hour's steadfast labour, her eyes fixed in a kind of ecstasy upon the little corner of palm which she had encrusted with satin stitch and gold; "but if I *do*, I really think it will repay me for all my trouble."

To-night her mind was divided between her embroidery and her son, who sat on a three-cornered chair beside her, meekly threading her needles while he tried to get her to talk about Suzette.

His father was seated almost out of earshot, at a table near the open window, reading the *Nineteenth Century* by the light of a shaded-lamp which shone full upon his lowered eyelids, and on the thoughtful brow and sensitive mouth, as he sat in a reposeful attitude in the low, deep chair.

"Do I like Miss Vincent?" repeated Lady Emily, when she had

turned a critical corner in the leafy edging of a scroll. "I wonder how often you will make me tell you that I think her a very—no, Allan, the light peacoek, please—not that dark shade—very sweet girl—bright, unaffected—— "

"And exquisitely lovely," interjeeted her son, as he handed her the needleful of silk.

"Ah, there you exaggerate awfully. She is certainly a pretty girl; but her nose is—well, I hardly know how to deseribe it; but there is a fault somewhere in the nose, and her mouth might be smaller; but, on the other hand, she has fine eyes. Her manners are really charming—that pretty little Parisian air whieh is so fascinating in a high-bred Parisian. But, oh, Allan! can you really mean to marry her? "

"I really mean to try my hardest to achieve that happiness, and I shall think myself the luckiest man in Wiltshire, or in England, or in Europe, if I succeed."

"But, Allan, have you reflected seriously? She tells me that she is a Roman Catholic."

"If she were a Fire-worshipper, I would run the risk of failure in converting her to Christianity. If she were a Buddhist, I should be inelined to embrace the faith of Gautama; but sinee she is only a conformer to a more aneient form of the religion of which you and I are followers, I don't see why her creed should be a stumbling-bloek to my bliss."

Lady Emily shook her head sagely, and breathed a profound sigh.

"Differences of religion are so apt to make unhappiness in married life."

"I am not religious enough to distress myself because my wife believes in some things that are incredible to me. We shall both follow the same Master, both hope for reunion in the same heaven."

"Allan, *she* believes in Purgatory. Think how inconsistent your ideas of the future must be."

Allan did not pursue the argument. He was smiling to himself at the easy way in whieh he had been talking of his wife—their future, their very hopes of heaven—making so sure that she was to be his. He looked at his father, sitting alone with them, but not of them, and thought of his father's married life as he had seen it ever since he was old enough to observe or understand the life around him; so peaeeful, so in all things what married life should be; and yet over all there had been that faint shadow of melancholy which the son had felt from his earliest years, that absence of the

warmth and the romance of a marriage where love is the bond of union. Here, Allan told himself, the bond had been friendly regard, convenience, the world's approval, family interests, and lastly the child as connecting link and chief point of sympathy. Love had been missing from the life of yonder pale student, musing over half a dozen pages of modern metaphysics.

Allan rose and moved slowly towards that tranquil figure, and feeling the night-air blowing cold as he approached that end of the room, he asked his father if he would like the windows shut?

"No, thank you, Allan, not on my account," Mr. Carew answered, without looking up from his book.

Had he looked up, he would have seen Allan standing between the lamplight and the window like a man transfixed.

A pale wan face had that moment vanished in the outward darkness; a face which a moment before had been looking in at one of the open lattices, a face which Allan had recognized at the first glance.

He went to the glass door, opened it quietly, and went out to the terrace, so quickly and so silently that his disappearance attracted no attention from father or mother, one absorbed in his book, the other bent over her work.

The face was the face of Mrs. Wornock; and Mrs. Wornock must be somewhere between the terrace and the gates. There was no moon, but the night was clear, and the sky was full of stars. Allan went swiftly round the angle of the house to the terrace outside the large window; but the figure that he had seen from within was no longer stationed outside the window. The terrace was empty. He went round to the front of the house, whence the carriage drive wound with a gentle curve to the gates, between shrubberies of laurel and arbutus, cypress and deodara.

Yes, the figure he had expected to see vanished round the curve of the drive as he drew near the porch, a slender figure in dark raiment, with something white about the head and shoulders. He ran along the drive, and reached the gate just in time to see Mrs. Wornock's brougham standing in the road, at a distance of about fifty yards, and to see Mrs. Wornock open the door and step in. Another moment—affording him no time for pursuit, had he even wished to pursue her—and the carriage drove away.

Allan had no doubt as to the motive of this conduct. She had come by stealth to look upon the face of the man whom she had refused to meet in the beaten way of friendship.

CHAPTER IX.

"SO GREW MY OWN SMALL LIFE COMPLETE."

AFTER the incident of that September night, there was no longer the shadow of doubt in Allan's mind as to the relations between his father and the lady of Discombe Manor. That they had known each other and loved each other in their youth he was now fully convinced. This last strange act of Mrs. Wornock's was to his mind the strongest link in the chain of evidence. Whatever the relations between them had been, guilty or innocent—and fondly as he loved his father, he feared there had been guilt in that association—it was his duty to prevent any meeting between them, lest the mere sight of that pale, spiritual face with its singular youthfulness of expression, should re-awaken in his father's breast some faint ghost of the passion that had lived and died a quarter of a century ago. Nor did his respect for his honest-minded, trustful-hearted mother permit him to tolerate the idea of friendly intercourse between her and this mysterious rival from the shadow-land of vanished years. He took care, therefore, to discourage any idea of visiting the Manor; and he carefully avoided any further talk of Mrs. Wornock, lest his father's closer questioning should bring about the disclosure of her identity. His father's manner, when the lady was first discussed, had shown him very clearly that the description of her gifts and fancies coincided with the memory of some one known in the past; but it had been also clear that neither the name of Wornock, nor the lady's position at Discombe, had any association for Mr. Carew. If he had known and loved her in the past, he had known and loved her before she married old Geoffrey Wornock.

His anxiety upon his father's account was speedily set at rest, for Mr. Carew—after exploring his son's small and strictly popular library, where among rows of handsomely bound standard works, there were practically no books which appealed to the scholar's taste—soon wearied of unstudious ease, and announced a stern necessity for going to London, where a certain defunct Hebrew scholar's library, lay and ecclesiastical, was to be sold at Hodgson's. He would put up for a few days at the old-fashioned hotel which he had used since he was an undergraduate, potter

about among the book-shops, look up some references he wanted in the Museum Reading-room, and meet his wife at Liverpool Street on her way home.

Lady Emily, absorbed in her son and her son's love affair, agreed most amiably to this arrangement.

"Telegraph your day and hour for returning, when you have bought all the books you want," she said. "I'm afraid you spend more money on those dreadful old books, which nobody in Suffolk cares a straw about, than I do on my farm, which people come to see from far and wide."

"And a great nuisance your admirers are, Emily. I am very glad the Suffolk people are no book-lovers; and I hope you will never hint to anybody that my books are worth seeing."

"I could not say anything so untrue. Your shelves are full of horrors. Now Allan's library here is really delightful—*Blackwood's Magazine*, from the beginning, *Macaulay, Scott, Dickens, Thackeray, Bulwer, Lever, Marryat*—and all of them so handsomely bound! I think my brother showed excellent taste in literature, though I doubt if he ever read much. But as you seem happier in your library than anywhere else, I suppose one must forgive you for spending a fortune on books that don't interest anybody else. And one can't help being a little bit proud of your scholarship."

And so they kissed and parted, with the unimpassioned kiss of marriage which has never meant more than affectionate friendship. Lady Emily stood at the hall door while her husband drove off to the station, and then turned gaily to her son, and said—

"Now, Allan, I am yours to command. Let me see as much as possible of that sweet young thing you are in love with. Shall we go and call on her this afternoon? She has a white cat which may some day provide her with kittens to distribute among her friends, and, if so, I am to have one to bring up by hand as I did Snowdrop. You remember Snowdrop?"

Allan kissed his mother before he answered, but not for Snowdrop's sake.

"I have a vague recollection of something white and fluffy hanging to the skirt of your gown, that I used to tread upon."

"Yes, you were horrid. You very nearly killed him. Shall we go?"

"Please, please, please, mother dearest. I am ready this instant. Three o'clock. We shall get there at half-past, and if we loiter looking at white kittens, or the mother of potential kittens, till half-

past four, she will give us tea, and we can make an afternoon of it."

"Hadn't I better put on a bonnet, Allan?"

"No, no. You will go in your hat, just as you are. You will treat her without the slightest ceremony—treat her as your daughter. Do you know, mother, I am uncommonly glad you never honoured me with a sister."

"Why, Allan?"

"Because, if I marry Suzette, she will be your only daughter. There will be no one to be jealous of her, in Suffolk or here."

"What a foolish fancy! Well, give me a daughter as soon as you like. I am getting old, Allan, and your father's secluded habits leave me very often alone. His books are more his companions than I am——"

"Ah, but you know how he loves you, mother," interrupted Allan.

They were on their way to the gate by this time, Lady Emily in her travelling-hat and loose tan gloves, just as she had been going about the gardens and meadows in the morning, Allan twirling his stick in very gladness of heart.

They were going to her. If she were out, they would go and find her; at her aunt's, at the Vicarage, on the links yonder; anywhere but at Discombe. He hoped she had not gone to Discombe.

"Yes, he is fond of me, I believe, in his own way. There never was a better husband," Lady Emily answered, thoughtfully. "But I know, Allan! I know!"

"What, mother?"

"I know that I was not his first love—that I was only a *pis aller* —that there is something wanting in his life, and always must be till the end. I should brood over it all, perhaps, Allan, and end by making myself very unhappy, if it were not for my farm; but all those living creatures occupy my mind. One living fox-terrier is worth a whole picture-gallery."

Suzette was at home. The after-math had been cut in the meadow in front of Marsh House, a somewhat swampy piece of ground at some seasons, but tolerably dry just now, after a hot summer. Suzette and Bessie Edgefield were tossing the scented grass in the afternoon sunshine, and fancying themselves useful haymakers. They threw down their hay-forks at the approach of visitors, and there was no more work done that day. They all sat in the garden talking, or wandered about among the flowers in a

casual way, and while Bessie and Lady Emily were looking at the contents of the only greenhouse, Allan found himself alone with Suzette in a long gravel walk on the other side of the lawn-like meadow, along all the length of which there was a broad border filled with old-fashioned perennials that had been growing and spreading and multiplying themselves for half a century. A row of old medlar and hazel trees sheltered this border from the north wind, and hid the boundary fence.

"Dear old garden!" cried Allan. "How much nicer an old garden is than a new one."

"I hope you don't mean to disparage your garden at Beechhurst. Our gardener is always complaining of the old age of all things here. Everything is worn out. The trees, the shrubs, the frames, the greenhouse. One ought to begin again from the very beginning, he says. He would be charmed with Beechhurst, where all things are so neat and trim."

"Cockney trimness, I'm afraid; but if you are satisfied with it, if you think it not altogether a bad garden——"

"I think it a delightful garden," said Suzette, blushing at that word "satisfied," which implied so much.

"I am glad of that," said Allan, with a deep sigh of content, as if some solemn question had been settled. "And you like my mother?"

"Very much indeed. But how you skip from the garden to Lady Emily."

"And you approve of the Mandarin-room?"

"It is one of the handsomest rooms I ever saw."

"Then take them, Suzette," he cried eagerly, with his arm round her waist, drawing the slim figure to his breast, holding and dominating her by force of will and strength of arm, smiling down at her with adoring eyes. "Have them, dearest! Mother, garden, room—they are all your own; for they belong to your very slave. They are at your feet, as I am."

"Do you call this being at my feet?" she asked, setting herself suddenly free, with a joyous laugh. "You have a very impertinent way of offering your gifts."

"Not impertinent—only desperate. I remembered my repulse of the other day, and I swore to myself that I would hold you in my arms—once, at least, if only once, even if you were to banish me into outer darkness the next moment—and I have done it, and I am glad! But you won't banish me, will you, Suzette? You

must needs know how I love you—how long and patiently I have loved you——"

"Long! patiently! Why, we only met at Midsummer."

"Ah, consider the age that every day on which I did not see you has seemed to me, and the time would hardly come within your powers of computation. Suzette, be merciful! say you love me, were it ever so little. Were it only a love like a grain of mustard-seed, I know it would grow into a wide and spreading tree by-and-by, and all the days of my life would be happy under its shelter."

"You would think me curiously inconsistent if I owned to loving you after what I said the other day," faltered Suzette, looking down at the flowers.

"I should think you adorable."

She was only serious for a moment, and then her natural gaiety prevailed.

"Do you know that my aunt lectured me severely when I confessed to having refused your flattering offer?"

"Did she really? How utterly sweet of her! After that, you cannot refuse me again. Your aunt would shut you up and feed you upon bread and water, as fathers and mothers used to do with rebellious daughters in the eighteenth century."

"I hardly think she would treat me quite so ferociously for saying 'No;' but I think she would be pleased if I were to say 'Yes.'"

"And that means yes, my love, my own!" he cried, in a rapture so swift and sudden that he had clasped her to his breast and snatched the kiss of betrothal before she could check his impulsiveness. "You are my very own," he said, "and I am the happiest man in England. Yes, the happiest—— Did I say in England? What a contemptible notion! I cannot conceive the idea that anywhere upon this earth there beats a human heart so full of gladness as mine. Suzette, Suzette, Suzette!" he repeated tenderly, with a kiss for each comma.

"What a whirlwind you are!" she remonstrated. "And what a rag you are making of my frock! Oh, Allan, how you have hurried me into this! And even now I am not quite sure——"

"You are sure that I adore you! What more need my wife be sure of? Oh, my darling, I have seen wedlock where no love is—only affection and trustfulness and kindly feeling—all the domestic virtues with love left out! Dearest, such a union is like a picture

to the colour-blind, like music to the stone-deaf, like a landscape without sunlight. There is nothing in this world like love, and nothing can make up for love when love is wanting."

"And nothing can make up for love when love is wanting," repeated Suzette, suddenly serious. "Oh, Allan! what if I am not sure?—if I doubt my own feelings?"

"But you can't doubt. My dearest, I am reading the signs and tokens of love in those eloquent eyes, in those sensitive lips, while you are talking of doubt. There is no one else, is there, Suzette?" he asked, with quick earnestness. "No one in the past whose image comes between you and me?"

"No one, no one."

"In all your Indian experiences?"

"No one."

"Then I am more than satisfied. And now let us go and tell my mother. She has been waiting for a daughter ever since I was born; and, behold, at last I am giving her one, the sweetest her heart could desire."

Suzette submitted, and walked by his side in silence while he went in search of Lady Emily, whom he finally discovered in the poultry-yard with Bessie Edgefield. Allan's elated air and Suzette's blushes were a sufficient indication of what had happened; and when mother and son had clasped hands and looked at each other there was no need of words. Lady Emily took the girl to her heart and kissed her.

"I hope your father will be pleased, Suzette."

"I don't think he will be sorry."

"And I know Mrs. Mornington will be glad. Allan has her consent in advance."

"Auntie is a very silly woman," said Suzette, laughingly. And then she had to endure Bessie Edgefield's congratulations, which were of the boisterous kind.

"Of course you will let me be bridesmaid," she said, with that vulgar, practical view of things which wounds the sensitiveness of the newly betrothed almost as much as an estimate from a furniture dealer, or a circular from an insurance office.

CHAPTER X.

"OUR DREAMS PURSUE OUR DEAD, AND DO NOT FIND."

MISS VINCENT'S engagement met with everybody's approval, with the one exception of the marriageable young ladies of the neighbourhood, who thought that Allan Carew had made a foolish choice, and might certainly have done better for himself. What good could come of marrying a girl who was neither English nor French; who had been educated in a Parisian convent, and who drove to Salisbury every Sunday morning to hear mass?

"What uncomfortable Sundays they will have!" one of these young ladies remarked to Bessie Edgefield; "and then how horrid for him to have a wife of a different creed! They are sure to quarrel about religion. Isn't the Vicar dreadfully shocked?"

"My father is rather sorry that Mr. Carew should marry a Roman Catholic. There is always the fear that he might go over to Rome——"

"Of course. He is sure to do that. It will be the only way to stop the quarrelling. She will make him a pervert."

Mrs. Mornington, on the other hand, flattered herself that, by her marriage with a member of the English Church, her niece would be brought to see the errors of Rome, and would very soon make her appearance in the faculty pew beside her husband.

Lady Emily cherished the same hope, since, although a less ardent Churchwoman than Mrs. Mornington, she believed in Anglicanism as the surest road to salvation, and she dwelt also upon the difficulties that might arise by-and-by about the poor dear children, talking of those potential beings as if they were already on the scene.

Here General Vincent tried to reassure the anxious mother.

"I have talked to your son," he said, "and he is willing that it shall be with him and Suzette as it was with her dear mother and me. If there are children, the sons are to follow their father's religion, the daughters their mother's."

"Well, I suppose that kind of compromise is best, though no Roman priest will approve of it. And then there is the sad idea of the brothers and sisters being separated by their antagonistic

opinions. I hope Suzette will come round to our way of thinking."

"I doubt it very much. She is as firm as a rock."

"Dear girl! She is so young, and there is plenty of time."

While other people were thinking about these things for him, Allan had no room for thought of any kind, unless fond meditation upon the image of the girl he loved could be dignified by the name of thought. For Allan, life was a perpetual ecstasy. To be with Suzette in her own home, at the Grove, on the links, anywhere—to be with her was all he needed for bliss. For his sake, his mother had prolonged her stay at Beechhurst, in order that the two young people might be together in the house where they were to live as man and wife. It was Allan's delight to make Suzette familiar with her future home. He wanted her to feel that this was the house in which she was to live; that under her father's roof she was no longer at home; that her books, the multifarious trifles and prettinesses which her girlhood had accumulated, might as well be transferred at once to the sunny, bow-windowed upstair room which was to be her den. It was now a plainly furnished, matter-of-fact morning room, a room in which the Admiral had kept his boots, cigar-boxes, and business documents, and transacted the fussy futilities of his unoccupied life. The mantelpiece, which had been built up with shelves and artful cupboards for the accommodation of the Admiral's cigars, would serve excellently to set off Suzette's zoological china; her Dresden pugs, and rats, and lobsters, and pigs, and rabbits, her morsels of silver, and scraps of wrought copper would adorn the shelves; and all her little odds and ends and never-to-be-finished bits of fancy-work could be neatly stowed away in the cupboards.

"But won't you want those dear little cubby-houses for your own cigars?" asked Suzette. "It seems too cruel to rob you of your uncle's snuggery. I've no doubt you smoke just as much as the Admiral."

"Not cigars. My humble pipe and pouch can stow themselves away anywhere. I only smoke cigars out hunting, and I keep a box or two in the saddle-room for handiness. No, this is to be your room, Suzette. I have imagined you in it until it seems so to belong to you that I feel I am taking a liberty in writing a letter here. When are you going to bring the Dresden bow-wows, and the elephants, and mice, and lobsters, and donkeys?—all about of a size, by the way."

"Oh, I could not possibly spare them," Suzette answered quickly, making for the door.

They had come in to look at the room, and for Suzette to give her opinion as to the colour and style of the new papering. It was to be a Morris paper, although that would entail new carpet and curtains, and a complete revolution as to colouring.

"Spare them!" echoed Allan, detaining her. "Who wants you to spare them? When will you bring them with you? When are you coming to take possession of the house which is no home for me until you are mistress of it?"

This was by no means the first time the question had been asked. Again and again had Allan pleaded that his marriage might be soon. There was no reason why he should wait for his wife. His position was established, his house was ready; a house as well found as that flagship had been on whose quarter-deck the Admiral had moved as a king. Why should he wait? He could never love his future wife more dearly than he loved her now. All the framework of his life would be out of gear till he had brought her home to the house which seemed joyless and empty for want of her.

"When is it to be, Suzette? When am I to be completely happy?"

"What, are you not happy, *par exemple*? You talked about overwhelming happiness when I said 'Yes.'"

"That was the promise of happiness. It lifted me to the skies; but it was only the promise. I am pining for the realization. I want you all to myself—to have and to hold for ever and ever; beside my hearth; interwoven with my life; mine always and always; no longer a bright, capricious spirit, glancing about me like a gleam of sunshine, and vanishing like the sunbeam; but a woman—my very own—of one mind and of one heart with me. Suzette, if you love me, you will not spin out the time of dreams; you will give yourself to me really and for ever."

There was an earnestness in his tone that scared her. The blushes faded from her cheeks, and she looked at him pale and startled, and sudden tears rushed to her eyes.

"You said you would give me time," she faltered; "time to know you better—to be certain." And then recovering her gaiety in an instant—"Now, Allan, it is too bad of you. Did I not tell you that I would not be married till my one-and-twentieth birthday? Why do you tease me to alter the date? Surely you don't want to marry an infant."

"And your birthday will be on the twenty-third of June," said Allan, rather sullenly. "Nearly a year from now."

"Nearly a year from October to June! What odd ideas you have about arithmetic! And now I must run and find Lady Emily. We are going to drive to Morton Towers together."

Allan made way for her to pass, and followed her downstairs, vexed and disheartened. His mother was to leave him next day; and then there would be one house the less in which he and Suzette could meet—the house which was to be their home.

He had not visited Mrs. Wornock since her nocturnal perambulation, and he had prevented his mother paying her a second visit, albeit the hope of a white peacock and a certain interest in the widow's personality had made Lady Emily anxious to call at the Manor. Allan had found reasons for putting off any such call, without saying one disparaging word about the lady. He had heard of Mrs. Wornock from Suzette, who reproached him for going no more to Discombe.

"I did not know you were so fickle," she said. "I really think you have behaved abominably to poor Mrs. Wornock. She is always asking me why you don't go to see her; and I am tired of inventing excuses."

Suzette was at the Manor every other day. Mrs. Wornock was teaching her to play the organ.

"Is it not sweet of her?" she asked Allan. "And though I don't suppose she ever gave any one a lesson in her life till she began to teach me, she has the teaching gift in a marked degree. I love to learn of her. I can play some simple things of Haydn's not altogether badly. Perhaps you will do me the honour to come and hear me some day, when I have got a little further."

"I will go to hear you to-morrow, if I may."

"What! Then you have no objection to Discombe in the abstract, though you have cut poor Mrs. Wornock for the last six weeks?"

"I was so much occupied with my mother."

"And your mother wanted badly to call upon Mrs. Wornock, and you always put a stumbling-block in her way. But I am happy to say Lady Emily is to have the white peacock all the same. She is to have a pair of birds. I have taken care of that."

"Like a good and thoughtful daughter."

When Allan came back from the station, after seeing his mother

safely seated in the London train, he found a letter from Mrs. Wornock on the hall table—a hand-delivered letter which had just arrived. It was brief and to the point.

"Why have you deserted me, Allan? Have I unconsciously offended you, or is there no room in your heart for friendship as well as love? I hear of your happiness from Suzette; but I want to see you and your sweetheart roaming about the gardens here as in the old days, before you were engaged lovers. Now that Lady Emily is leaving Beechhurst, you will have time to spare for me."

The letter seemed a reproach, and he felt that he deserved to be reproached by her. How kind she had been, how sympathetic, how interested in his love-story; and what an ingrate he must appear in her eyes!

He did not wait for the following morning and the music-lesson, lest Mrs. Wornock should think he went to Discombe only on Suzette's account. He set out immediately after reading that reproachful little letter, and walked through the lanes and copses to the Manor House.

It was four o'clock when he arrived, and Mrs. Wornock was at home and alone. The swelling tones of that wonderful organ answered his question on the threshold. No beginner could play with that broad, strong touch, which gave grandeur to the simple phrases of an "Agnus Dei" by Palestrina.

She started up as Allan was announced, and went quickly to meet him, giving him both her hands.

"This is so good of you," she exclaimed. "Then you are not offended, and you have forgiven me?"

"My dear Mrs. Wornock, why should I be offended? I have received nothing but kindness from you."

"I thought you might be angry with me for refusing the invitation to your luncheon-party."

"It would have been very impertinent of me to be angry, when I know what a recluse you are."

"It is a month since you were here—a whole calendar month. Why didn't you bring Lady Emily to see me? But perhaps she did not wish to come. Was that so?"

"No, Mrs. Wornock," he answered coldly. "My mother wished to call upon you."

"And you prevented her?"

"Yes."

"Why did you do that?"

"Dare I be frank with you?"

"Yes, yes, yes! You cannot be too frank. I love you, Allan. Always remember that. You are to me as a second son."

Her warmth startled and scared him. His face flushed hotly, and he stood before her in mute embarrassment. If the secret of the past was indeed the guilty secret which he had suspected, there was utter shamelessness in this speech of hers.

"Allan, why are you silent?"

"Because there are some things that can hardly be said; least of all by a man of my age to a woman of yours."

"There is nothing that you can say to me, Allan, about myself or my regard for you, that can bring a blush to my face or to yours. There is nothing in my life of which I need be ashamed in your sight or in the sight of my son."

"Forgive me, forgive me, if my secret thoughts have sometimes wronged you. There has been so much to surprise and mystify me. Your agitation on hearing my father's name; your painful embarrassment when I brought my mother here; and last, and most of all, your secret visit to Beechhurst when my father was there."

"What! you know of that?"

"Yes; I saw your face at the open window, looking in at him."

She clasped her hands, and there were tears in her eyes.

"Yes," she faltered, after a silence of some moments, "I was looking at the face I had not seen for nearly thirty years—the face that looked at me like a ghost from the past, and had no knowledge of me, no care for me. I knew that he could not be dead. I have sought for him in the spirit-world, again and again and again, in long days and nights of waiting, in my dreams, in long, far-reaching thoughts that have carried my soul away from this dull earth; but there was no answer—not a thought, not a breath out of that unseen world where my spirit would have touched his had he died while he was young, and while he still loved me. But he lived, and grew old like me, and found a new love, and so we are as wide apart as if we had never met. I stood in the darkness outside your window for nearly an hour, looking at him, listening to his voice when he spoke—the dear, kind voice! *That* was not changed."

"It is true, then? You knew and loved my father years ago?"

"Yes, knew him and loved him, and would have been his wife if

it had been for his happiness to marry me. Think of that, Allan! I was to have been his wife, and I gave him up for his own sake."

"Why did you do that? Why should you not have married him?"

"Because I was only a poor girl, and he was a gentleman—the only son of a rich widow, and his mother would never have forgiven him for such a marriage. I knew nothing of that when he asked me to be his wife. I only knew that we loved each other truly and dearly. But just before the day that was to have been our wedding-day his mother came to me, and told me that if I persisted in marrying him I should be the bane of his life. It would be social extinction for him to marry me. Social extinction! I remember those words, though I hardly knew then what they meant. I was not eighteen, Allan, and I knew less of the world than many children of eight. But I did not give up my happiness without a struggle. There was strong persuasion brought to bear upon me; and at last I yielded—for his sake."

"And blighted his life!" exclaimed Allan. "My mother is the best of women, and the best and kindest of wives; but I have always known that my father's marriage was a loveless marriage. Well," he went on, recovering himself quickly, apprehensive lest he should cheapen his mother's position by revealing too much, "you acted generously, and no doubt for the best, in making that sacrifice, and all has worked round well. You married a good man, and secured a position of more importance than my father's smaller means could have given you."

"Position! means!" she repeated, in bitterest scorn. "Oh, Allan, don't think so poorly of me as to suppose that it was Mr. Wornock's wealth which attracted me. I married him because he was kind and sympathetic and good to me in my loneliness—a pupil at a German conservatoire, living with stony-hearted people, who only cared for me to the extent of the money that was paid for my board and lodging, and who were always saying hard things to me because they had agreed to take me so cheaply—too cheaply, they said. I used to feel as if I were cheating them when I sat at their wretched meals, and I was thankful that I had a wretched appetite."

"You were cruelly used, dear Mrs. Wornock. I can just remember my grandmother, and I know she was a hard woman. She had no right to interfere with her son's disposal of his life."

"No, she had no right. If I had known even as much of the

world as I know now, when Miss Marjorum—Mrs. Beresford's messenger—came to me, I would have acted differently. I know now that a gentleman need not be ashamed of marrying a penniless girl if there is nothing against her but her poverty; but, then, I believed what Miss Marjorum told me—believed that I should blight the life of the man who loved me with such generous self-sacrificing love. Why should he alone be generous, and I selfish and indifferent to his welfare?"

"But how did he suffer you to sacrifice yourself at his mother's bidding?"

"He had no power to stop me. It was all settled without his knowledge. I hope he was not very sorry—dear, dear George!—so generous, so true, so noble. Oh, how I loved him—how I have loved him—all my life, all my life! My husband knew that I had no heart to give him—that I could be his obedient wife—but that I could never love him as I had loved——"

Again her sobs choked her speech. She threw herself into a chair and abandoned herself to that passionate grief.

"Dear Mrs. Wornock, forgive me for having revived these sorrowful memories. I was wrong—I ought not to have spoken——"

"No, no, there is nothing to forgive. It does me good to talk of the past—with you, Allan, with you, not with any one else. And now you know why my heart went out to you from the first. Why you are to me almost as a son—almost as dear as my own son—and your future wife as my daughter. It does me good to talk to you of that time—so long and long ago. It does me good to talk of my dead self. I have never forgotten. The past has always been dearer to me than anything in this life that came afterwards."

"I do not think my father has forgotten any more than you have, Mrs. Wornock. I know that there has always been a cloud over his life—the shadow of one sad memory. I have felt and understood this, without knowing whence the shadow came."

"He was too true-hearted to forget easily," Mrs. Wornock said, gently, "and we were both so young. I was his first love, as he was mine. And when a first love is pure and strong as ours was, it must be first and last, must it not, Allan?"

"Yes," he answered, half doubtfully, remembering certain sketchy loves of his own, and hoping that they could hardly be ranked as love, so that he might believe that his passion for Suzette was essentially the first; essentially, if not actually.

"No, I have never forgotten," Mrs. Wornock repeated musingly,

seating herself at the piano, and softly touching the notes now and then, playing a few bars of pensive melody *sotto voce* as she talked —now a phrase from an Adagio of Beethoven's, now a resolution from a prelude by Bach, dropping gravely down into the bass with softly repetitive phrases, from piano to pianissimo, melting into silence like a sigh. "No, I have never forgotten—and I have suffered from the pains as well as the pleasures of memory. Before my son was born, and after, there was a long interval of darkness when I lived only in the past, when the shadows of the past were more real to me than the living things of the present, when my husband's face was dim and unreal, and that dear face from the past was always near me, with the kind smile that comforted me in my desolate youth. Yes, I loved him, Allan, loved him, and gave him up for his own sake. And now you tell me my sacrifice was useless; that, even with the wife his mother chose for him, the kind good wife, he has not been altogether happy."

"His life has been placid, studious, kindly, and useful. It may be that he was best fitted for that calm, secluded life—it may be that if you had taken the more natural and the more selfish course —and in so doing parted him for ever from his mother, who was a proud woman, capable of lifelong resentment—it may be that remorse might have blighted his life, and that even your love would not have consoled him under the conviction that he had broken his mother's heart. I know that, after her strong-minded masterful fashion, she adored him. He was all she had in this world to love or care for; and it is quite possible that a lasting quarrel with him might have killed her. Dear Mrs. Wornock, pray do not think that your sacrifice was altogether in vain. No such self-surrender as that can be without some good fruit. I do not pretend to be a holy person, but I do believe in the power of goodness. And, consider, dear friend, your life has not been all unhappy. You had a kind and good husband."

"Good! He was more than good, and for over a year of our married life I was a burden to him. He was an exile from the home he loved, for my sake—for me, who ought to have brightened his home for him."

"But that was only a dark interval," said Allan, remembering what Mrs. Mornington had told him, of the long residence at Grindelwald, and the birth of the heir in that remote spot. "There were happier days afterwards."

"Yes, we had a few peaceful years here, before death took

him from me, and while our boy was growing in strength and beauty."

"And in these long years of widowhood music has been your comforter. In your devotion to art you have lived the higher life."

"Yes," she answered, with an inspired look, striking a triumphant chord, "music has been my comforter—music has conjured back my dead father, my lost lover. Music has been my life and my hope."

CHAPTER XL.

THE MASTER OF DISCOMBE.

MRS. WORNOCK'S frank revelation of her girlish love and self-sacrifice lifted a burden from Allan's heart and mind. He had been interested in her, and attracted towards her from that first summer noontide when he studied her thoughtful face in the village church, and when he lingered among the villagers' graves to hear her play. His sympathy had grown with every hour he spent in her society, and he had been deeply grateful for the friendship which had so cordially included him and the girl he loved. It had been very painful to him to believe that this sweet-mannered woman belonged to the fallen ones of the earth, that her graces were the graces of a Magdalen, most painful to think that she was no fitting companion for the girl who had so readily responded to her friendly advances.

The cloud was lifted now, and he felt ashamed of all his past doubts and suspicions. He respected Mrs. Wornock for her refusal to meet his father in the beaten way of friendship. He was touched by the devotion which had brought her creeping to his windows under the cover of night to look upon the face of her beloved. He resolved that he would do all that in him lay to atone for the wrong his thoughts had done her, that he would be to her, indeed, as a second son, and that he would cultivate her son's friendship in a brotherly spirit.

He stopped in the corridor on the morning after that interview to study the portrait of the young man whose likeness to himself had now resolved itself into a psychological mystery, and he could but

see that it was a likeness of the mind rather than of the flesh, a resemblance in character and expression far more than in actual lineaments.

"He is vastly my superior in looks," thought Allan, as he studied the lines of that boldly painted face. "He has his mother's finely chiselled features, his mother's delicate colouring. There is a shade of effeminacy, otherwise the face would be almost faultless. And to mistake this face for that! Absurd!" muttered Allan, catching the reflection of his sunburnt forehead, and strongly marked nose and chin, in the Venetian glass that hung at right angles with the picture.

He heard the organ while the footman paused with his hand on the door, waiting to announce the visitor. The simpler music, the weaker touch, told him that the pupil was playing.

"Please don't stop," he cried, as he went in; "I want to hear if the pupil is worthy of her mistress."

Mrs. Wornock came to meet him, and Suzette went on playing, with only a smile and a nod to her sweetheart.

"She is getting on capitally. She has a real delight in music," announced Mrs. Wornock.

"How happy you are looking this morning!"

"I have had good news. My son is on his way home."

"I congratulate you."

"He is coming home for his long leave. I shall have him for nearly a year."

"How happy you will be! I have just been studying his portrait."

"You are so like him."

"Oh, only a rough copy—a charcoal sketch on coarse paper,—nothing to boast of," said Allan, with a curious laugh.

He was watching Suzette, to see if she were interested in the expected arrival. She played on, her eyes intent alternately upon the page of music in front of her, and upon the stops which she was learning to use. There was no stumbling in the notes, or halting in the time. She played the simple legato passages smoothly and carefully, and seemed to pay no heed to their talk.

Allan would have been less than human, perhaps, if his first thought on hearing of Geoffrey's return had not been of the influence he might exercise upon Suzette—whether in him she would recognize the superior and more attractive personality.

"No," he thought, ashamed of that jealous fear which was so

quick to foresee a rival, "Suzette has given me her heart, and it must be my own fault if I can't keep it. Women are our superiors, at least in this, that they are not so easily caught by the modelling of a face, or the rich tones of a complexion. And shall I think so meanly of my sweet Suzette as to suppose that my happiness is in danger because some one more attractive than myself appears upon the scene? When we spend our first season in London as man and wife, she will have to run the gauntlet of all the agreeable men in town, soldiers and sailors, actors and painters, ingenuous young adorers and hoary-headed flatterers. The whole army of Satan that maketh war upon innocence and beauty. No, I am not afraid. She has a fine brain and a noble heart. She is not the kind of woman to jilt a lover or betray a husband. I am safe in loving her."

He had need to comfort himself, for the hour of trial was nearer than he thought.

He went to Discombe before luncheon on the morning after he had heard of Geoffrey's return. He went expecting to find Suzette at the organ, and to hear the latter part of the lesson. He was not a connoisseur, but he loved music well enough to love to hear his sweetheart play, and to be able to distinguish every shade of improvement in her performance. To-day, however, the organ was silent; the youth who blew the bellows was chasing a wasp in the corridor, and the room into which Allan was ushered was empty.

"The ladies are in the garden, sir," said the footman. "Shall I tell my mistress that you are here?"

"No, thanks, I'll go and look for the ladies."

The autumn morning was bright and mild, and one of the French windows was open.

Allan hurried out to the garden, and looked down the cypress avenue. The long perspective of smooth-shaven lawn was empty. There was no one loitering by the fountain. They were in the summer-house—the classic temple where Mrs. Wornock had sunk into unconsciousness at the sound of his father's name, where he had lived through the most embarrassing experience of his life.

He could distinguish Mrs. Wornock's black gown, and Suzette's terra-cotta frock, a cloth frock from the Salisbury tailor, which he had greatly admired. But there was another figure that puzzled him—an unfamiliar figure in grey—a man's figure.

Never had the grass walk seemed so long, or the temple so remote. Yes, that third figure was decidedly masculine. There was

no optical delusion as to the sex of the stranger—no petticoat hidden behind the marble table. As he drew nearer he saw that the intruder was a young man, sitting in a lounging attitude with his arms resting on the table, and his shoulders leaning forward to bring him nearer to the two ladies seated opposite.

He felt that it would be undignified to run, but he walked so fast in his eagerness to discover the identity of the interloper that he was in an undignified perspiration when he arrived.

"Allan, poor Allan, how you have been running!" exclaimed Suzette.

"I was vexed with myself for losing the whole of your organ lesson," said Allan, shaking hands with Mrs. Wornock, and gazing at the stranger as at a ghost.

Yes, it was Geoffrey Wornock. Even his hurried reflections during that hurried walk had told Allan that it must be he, and none other. No one else would be admitted to the familiarity of the garden and summer-house. Mrs. Wornock had no casual visitors, no intimate friends, except Suzette and himself.

"There has been no organ lesson this morning, Allan," Mrs. Wornock told him, her face radiant with happiness. "Suzette and I have been surprised out of all sober occupations and ideas. This son of mine took it into his head to come home nearly a fortnight before I expected him. He arrived as suddenly as if he had dropped from the skies. He did not even telegraph to be met at the station."

"A telegram would have taken the edge off the surprise, mother," said the man in grey, standing up tall and straight, but slenderly built.

Allan felt himself a coarse gladiatorial sort of person beside this elegant and refined-looking young man. Nor was there anything effeminate about that graceful figure to which an envious critic could take exception. Soldiering had given that air of manliness which can co-exist with a thread-paper figure, and a girlish waist.

"Geoffrey, this is Allan, of whom you know so much."

"They tell me that you and I are very much alike, Mr. Carew," said Geoffrey, with a pleasant laugh, "and my mother tells me that you and I are to take kindly to each other, and in fact she expects to see us by way of being adopted brothers—I don't quite know what that means—whether we are to ride each other's horses, and make free with each other's guns, or go halves in a yacht or a racehorse?"

"I want you to like each other—to be real friends," said Mrs. Wornock, earnestly.

"Then don't say another word about it, mother. Friendship under that kind of protecting influence rarely comes to any good; but I am quite prepared to like Mr. Carew on his own account, and I hope he may be able to like me on the same poor grounds."

He had an airy way of dismissing the subject which set them all at their ease, and steered them away from the rocks and shoals of sentiment. Mrs. Wornock, who had been on the verge of weeping, smiled again, and led Geoffrey off to look at the gardens, and all the improvements which had been effected during his three years' absence, leaving the lovers to follow or not as they pleased.

The lovers stayed in the summer-house, feeling that mother and son would like to be alone; and mother and son strolled on side by side, looking like brother and sister.

"My dearest," said Mrs. Wornock, tenderly, slipping her arm through her son's directly they were really alone, and out of sight, in the old quadrangular garden walled round by dense hedges of clipped ilex, a garden laid out in a geometrical pattern, and with narrow gravel paths intersecting the flower-beds. The glory of all gardens was over. There were only a few lingering dahlias, and prim asters lifting up their gaudy discs to the sun, and beds of marigolds of different shades, from palest yellow to deepest orange.

"My dearest, how glad I am to have you! I begin to live again now you have come home."

"And I am very glad to be at home, mother," answered her son, smiling down upon her, fondly, protectingly, but with that light tone which marked all he said. "But it seems to me you have been very much alive while I have been away, with this young man of yours who is almost an adopted son."

"My heart went out to him, Geoffrey, because of his likeness to you."

"A dangerous precedent. You might meet half a dozen such likenesses in a London season. It would hardly do for your heart to go out to them all. You would be coming home with a large family—by adoption."

"There is no fear of that. I don't go into society, and I don't think, if I did, I should meet any one like Allan Carew."

Geoffrey could but note the tenderness in her tone as she spoke Allan's name.

"And who is this double of mine, mother; and what is he, and

how does he come to be engaged to that dainty, dark-eyed girl?"

"You like Suzette?"

"Yes, I like her—she is a nice, winning thing—not startlingly pretty; but altogether nice. I like the way that dark silky hair of hers breaks up into tiny curls about her forehead—and she has fine eyes——"

"India has made you critical, Geoffrey."

"Not India, but a native disposition, mother dearest. In India we have often to put up with second best in the way of beauty, faded carnations, tired eyes, hollow cheeks; but the young women have generally plenty to say for themselves. They can talk, and they can dance. They are educated for the marriage market before they are sent out."

His mother laughed, and hung on to his arm admiringly. In her opinion, whatever he said was either wise or witty. All his impertinences were graceful. His ignorance was better than other people's knowledge.

"You have not neglected your violin, I hope, Geoffrey?"

"No, mother. My good little Strad has been my friend and comrade in many a quiet hour while the other fellows were playing cards, or telling stale stories. I shall be very glad to play the old de Beriot duets again. Your fingers have not lost their cunning, I know."

"I have played a great deal while you were away. I have had nothing else to think about."

"Except Allan Carew."

"He has not made much difference. He comes and goes as he likes—especially when Suzette is here. I sit at my organ or piano and let them wander about and amuse themselves."

"What an indulgent chaperon."

"I knew what the end must be, Geoffrey. I knew from the first that they were in love with each other. At least I knew from the very first that he was in love with her."

"You were not so sure about the lady?"

"A girl is too shy to let her feelings be read easily; but I could see she liked his society. They used to roam about the garden together like children. They were too happy not to be in love."

"Does being in love mean happiness, mother? Don't you think there is a middle state between indifference and passion—a cordial, comfortable, sympathetic friendship which is far happier than love?

It has no cold fits of doubt, no hot fits of jealousy. From your account of these young people, I question if they were ever really in love. Your Carew looks essentially commonplace. I don't give him credit for much imagination."

"You will understand him better by-and-by, dearest."

The mother was looking up at the newly regained son, admiring him, and beginning to fancy that she had done him an injustice in thinking that Allan resembled him. He was much handsomer than Allan, and there was something picturesque and romantic in his countenance and bearing which appealed to a woman's fancy; a look as of the Lovelaces and Dorsets of old, the courtiers and soldiers who could write a love-song on the eve of a bloody battle, or dance a minuet at midnight, and fight a duel at dawn. His manner to his mother was playful and protecting. He had not the air of thinking her the wisest of women, but no one could doubt that he loved her.

The summer-house was empty when they went back to it, and there was a pencilled note on the marble table addressed to Mrs. Wornock.

"Allan is going to see me home in time to give father his tiffin, and I think you and Mr. Wornock will like to have the day to yourselves. I shall come for my organ lesson to-morrow at eleven, unless you tell me to stop away—

"Ever, dear Mrs. Wornock, your own

"SUZETTE."

"Pretty tactful son! Of course we want to be alone," said Geoffrey, reading the note over his mother's shoulder. "First you shall give me the best lunch that Discombe can provide; and then we will drive round and look at everything. And we will devote the evening to de Beriot. I must go up to town by an early train to-morrow."

"Running away from me so soon, Geoffrey?"

"Now, mother, it's base ingratitude to say that. I've hardly given myself breathing time since I landed at Brindisi, because I wanted to push home to you, first of the very first. I shall only be in London a day or two. I want to see what kind of horses are being sold at Tattersall's, and I may run down to look at the Belhus hunters. Remember I haven't a horse to ride."

"There are your old hunters, Geoffrey?"

"Three dear old crocks. Admirable as pensioners, not to carry

eleven stone to hounds. No, mother, I'm afraid there's nothing in your stables that will be good for more than a cover-hack."

Mrs. Wornock sighed faintly in the midst of her bliss. She had a womanly horror of hunting and all its perils, and in her heart of hearts was always on the side of the fox; but she knew that without hunting and shooting Discombe Manor would very soon pall upon her son, dilettante, and Jack-of-all-trades though he was. Music alone—passionately as he loved it—would not keep him contented.

Allan and Suzette strolled home under the bright blue sky. These late days in October were the Indian summer of the year, a season in which it was a joy to live, especially in a land where the smoke from domestic hearths curling upward here and there in silvery wreaths from wood fires, only suggested homeliness and warmth, not filth and fog. They sauntered slowly homeward through the rustic lanes, and their talk was naturally of the new arrival.

"Is he the kind of young man you expected him to be?" asked Suzette.

There was no occasion to be more specific in one's mention of *him*. There could but be one young man in their thoughts to-day.

"I don't know that I had formed any expectations about him."

"Oh, Allan, that can't be true! You must have thought about him, after everybody telling you of the likeness. Remember what you told me in our very first dance—how dreadfully bored you had been about him, and how glad you were that I didn't know him?"

"My being bored—and I was horridly—was no reason why my imagination should dwell upon him. If I thought of him at all, I thought of him just as he is—the image of his portrait by Millais—and a very good-looking, and well set-up young man—so much better looking than my humble self that I wonder at any one's seeing a likeness between the two faces."

"Is he better looking, Allan? I know I like your face best."

"I'm glad of that, since you will have to put up with my face for a lifelong companion."

"Allan, how grumpily you said that."

"Did I, Suzie? I'm afraid I'm a brute. I am beginning to find out disagreeable depths in my character?"

She looked at him with a puzzled air—so sweetly innocent, so free from any backward-reaching thought—that made him happy

again. He took up the little hand hanging loose at her side and kissed it.

"Let us drop in upon Aunt Mornington, and ask her for lunch," he said as they came within sight of Marsh House. "I don't feel like parting with you just yet, Suzie."

"Quite impossible. I must be at home for father's tiffin."

"I forgot that sacred institution. Well, Suzie, do you think it's possible the general might ask me to share that important meal if he saw me hanging about? We could go to the links afterwards, so that you might have the pleasure of seeing how wildly I can beat the air?"

Suzie laughed her assent to this proposition, and General Vincent overtaking them five minutes afterwards on his useful hack, sustained an Anglo-Indian's reputation for hospitality by immediately inviting Allan to luncheon.

CHAPTER XII.

FATE INTERVENES.

The return of Geoffrey Wornock made no essential difference in the lives of the lovers. Suzette continued her organ practice; Allan continued his visits to the Manor House; and Suzette and Allan were much oftener Mrs. Wornock's companions than her only son, whose restless temper did not allow of his remaining long in any one place, and for whom monotony of any kind was intolerable.

He stayed in London for a week buying horses, and having brought home a string of four, every one supposed to be matchless, he began hunting with the vigour of a man whose appetite for that British sport had been only sharpened by paper-chases and polo in the tropics. Not content with the South Sarum, he travelled up and down the line, hunted with the Vine from Basingstoke, and with the H. H. from Winchester. He was up and away in the grey November mornings after a seven-o'clock breakfast, and seldom home in time for an eight-o'clock dinner.

On the days when there was no hunting to be had, he flung himself into the delights of the music-room with all the ardour of a musical fanatic, and Allan and Suzette were content to listen in

meek astonishment to performances which were far above the drawing-room amateur, although marked by certain imperfections and carelessnesses which seemed inevitable in a player whose ardour was too fitful for the drudgery of daily practice.

These musical days were the bright spots in Mrs. Wornock's existence, the chief bond of union between mother and son; as if music were the only spell which could hold this volatile spirit within the circle of domestic love.

"I like my mother to accompany me," said Geoffrey. "I have played with some prodigious swells, but none of them has had her sympathetic touch, her instantaneous comprehension of my spontaneities. They expected me to be faultily faultless, instead of which I play de Beriot as Chopin used to play Chopin, indulging every caprice as to time."

Geoffrey was occasionally present when one of the organ lessons was in progress. He was interested, but not so much so as to sit still and listen. He carried Allan off to the billiard-room, or the stable, before the lesson was half over.

"What a happy little family we are," he said laughingly one day, as he and Allan were strolling stablewards. "My mother is almost as fond of your *fiancée* as if she were her daughter."

"Your mother is a very amiable woman, as well as a gifted woman."

"Gifted? yes, that's the word. She is all enthusiasm. There have been no spiritualists or supernatural people here lately, I suppose?"

"No."

"I'm glad of that. My poor mother loses her head when that kind of people are in the way. She is ready to believe in their nonsense. She wants to believe. She wants to see visions and to dream dreams. She has secluded herself from the world of the living, and she would give half her fortune if she could bring the dead into her drawing-room. Poor dear mother! How many weary hours she has spent waiting for materializations that have never materialized. I have never been able to convince her that all her spiritualistic friends are pretenders and comedians. She tells me she knows that some are charlatans; but she believes that their theories are based upon eternal truths. She rebukes my scepticism with an appeal to the Witch of Endor. I dare not shock her by confessing that I have my doubts even about the Witch of Endor."

He had a way of making light of his mother's fancies and eccentricities which had in its gaiety no touch of disrespect. Gaiety was the chief characteristic of his temperament, as it was with Suzette. He brought a new element of mirthfulness into the life at Discombe Manor; but with this happy temperament there was the drawback of an eager desire for change and movement which disturbed the atmosphere of a house whose chief charm to Allan's mind had been its sober quiet, its atmosphere of old-world peace.

Allan studied this young man's character closely, studied him and thought of him much more than he wanted to think of him, and vainly struggled against an uneasy feeling that in every superiority of this new acquaintance there lurked a danger to his own happiness.

"He is handsomer than I am," mused Allan, in one of his despondent moods. "He has a gayer temper—Suzette's own temper—which sees all things in the happiest light. I sit and watch them, listen to them, and feel myself worlds away from them both; and yet if she were free to-morrow he could never love her as I love her. There, at least, I am the superior. He has no such power of concentration as I have. To his frivolous nature no woman could ever be all in all."

These despondent moods were luckily not of long duration. On Suzette's part there had not been the faintest sign of wavering; and Allan felt ashamed of the jealous fears which fell ever and anon like a black cloud across the sunny prospect of his life. However valiantly he might struggle against that lurking jealousy, there were occasions upon which he could not master it, and his darkest hours were those during which he sat in the music room at Discombe, and heard Suzette and Geoffrey playing concertante duets for violin and piano. It seemed to him as the violinist bent over the pretty dark head, to turn a leaf, or to explain a passage in the piano score, that for these two there was a language which he knew not, a language in which mind spoke to mind, and perhaps heart to heart. Who could keep the heart altogether out of the question when that most eloquent of all languages was making its impassioned appeal. Every long-drawn legato chord upon the Strad, every delicate diminuendo of the sighing strings, the tremulous bow so lightly held in the long lissom fingers, sounded like an avowal.

"I love you, I love you, I love you," sobbed the violin; "how can you care for that dumb, senseless brute yonder, while I am telling my love in heavenliest sounds, in strains that thrill along

every nerve, and tremble at the door of your heart? How can you care for that dumb dog, or care how you hurt him by your inconstancy?"

Possessed by these evil fancies, Allan started up from his seat in a remote window, and began to pace the room in the midst of a de Beriot sonata, to which Suzette had been promoted after a good deal of practice in less brilliant music.

"What's the matter, old fellow?" asked Geoffrey, noting that impatient promenade; "was I out of tune?"

"No, you were only too much in tune."

"How do you mean? I don't understand——"

"Is it likely you can understand me—or I you?" cried Allan impetuously. "You have a language which I have not, a sense which is lacking in me. You and Suzette are in a paradise whose gate I can't open. Don't think me an envious, churlish kind of fellow, if I sometimes grudge you your happiness."

"But, my dear Allan, you are fond of music—you like listening——"

"No, I don't. I have had too much listening, too much of being out of it. Put on your hat, Suzette, and come for a walk. I am tired to death of your de Beriot."

Mrs. Wornock was sitting a little way from the piano, reading. She looked up wonderingly at this outburst. Never before had Allan been guilty of such rough speech in her presence. Never before had he spoken with such rude authority to Suzette.

"If our music has not the good fortune to please you, I would suggest that there are several rooms in this house where you would not hear it," said Geoffrey, laying down his fiddle.

All the brightness had faded from his countenance, leaving it very pale. Suzette looked from one to the other with an expression of piteous distress. The two young men stood looking at each other, Allan flushed and fiery, Geoffrey's pallid face fixed and stern, with an anger which was stronger than the occasion warranted. They were sufficiently alike to make any ill-will between them seem like a brother's quarrel.

"You are very good, but I would rather be out-of-doors. Are you coming, Suzette?"

"Not till I have finished the sonata," she answered quietly, with a look which reproved his rudeness, and then began to play.

Geoffrey took up his fiddle, and the performance was resumed as if nothing had happened.

Mrs. Wornock rose and went to Allan.

"Will you come for a stroll with me, Allan?" she asked, taking up the warm Indian shawl which lay on a chair near the window. "It is not too cold for the garden."

He could not refuse such an invitation as this, though it tortured him to leave those two alone at the piano. He opened the window, wrapped Mrs. Wornock in her shawl, and followed her to the lawn.

"Allan, why were you angry just now?" she asked.

"Why? Perhaps I had better tell you the truth. I am miserable when I see the woman I love interested and enthralled by an art in which your son is a master—and of which I know hardly the A. B. C. I ask myself if she can care for a creature so inferior as I am—if she can fail to perceive his superiority."

"Jealous, Allan! Oh, I am so sorry. It was I who proposed that they should play duets. It was not Geoffrey's idea. I thought it would encourage Suzette to go on practising. You don't know the delight a pianist feels in accompanying a violin——"

"I think I can imagine it. Suzette takes very kindly to the concertante practice."

"She has improved so much since I first knew her. She has such a talent for music. It never occurred to me that you could object."

"It never occurred to you that I could be a jealous fool. You might just as well say that, for no doubt you think it."

"Yes, I think you are foolish to be jealous. Suzette is as true as steel; and I don't believe Geoffrey has the slightest inclination to fall in love with her."

"Not at this moment, perhaps; but who knows what tender feelings those dulcet strains may bring. However, Suzette will be leaving the neighbourhood, I hope, in a few days."

"Leaving us, you hope!"

"Yes. My mother has written to invite her to Fendyke. She is to see the White Farm, and get acquainted with all our Suffolk neighbours, who declare themselves dying to see her, while I am shooting my father's pheasants."

"You are both going away then? I shall miss you sadly."

"You will have Geoffrey."

"One day out of six, perhaps. He will be hunting or shooting all the rest of the week."

"We shall not be away very long. I don't suppose General

Vincent will spare us his daughter for more than a fortnight or three weeks."

"Suzette told me nothing about the invitation."

"She has not received the letter yet. The post had not come in when she left home. I met the postman on my way here, and read my letters as I came along. De Beriot has been too absorbing to allow of my telling Suzette about my mother's letter to me. Shall we go back? Unless that sonata is interminable, it must have come to an end before now."

Mrs. Wornock turned immediately. She saw Allan's uneasiness, and sympathized with him. They went back to the music-room, where there was only silence. Suzette had left the piano, and had put on her hat and jacket. Geoffrey was still standing in front of the music-stand, turning the leaves of the offending sonata.

"Good-bye, dear Mrs. Wornock," said Suzette, kissing her friend. "Now, Allan, I am quite ready."

Allan and Geoffrey shook hands at parting, but not with the usual smiling friendliness.

"How could you be so dreadfully rude, Allan?" Suzette said with a pained voice, as they walked away from the house. "You were quite hateful."

"I know that. I am astounded at my own capacity for hatefulness."

"I shall play no more concertante duets, though I have enjoyed them more than anything in the way of music. It was only the most advanced pupils at the Sacré Cœur who ever had accompanying lessons—and such happiness never fell to my share."

"I should be very sorry to interfere with your—happiness; but I think, Suzette, if you cared for me half as much as I care for you you would understand how it hurts me to see you so completely in sympathy with another man, and happy with a happiness which I cannot share."

"Why should you not share our happiness, Allan? You are fond of music, I know."

"Fond of music—yes; but I am not a musician. I cannot make music as that young man can. I cannot speak to you as he speaks to you, in that language which is his and yours, and not mine. I am standing outside your world. I feel myself thrust far off from you, while he is so near."

"Allan!" cried Suzette, with a smile that was a pale shadow of her old sportiveness, "can you actually be jealous?"

"I'm afraid I can."

"Jealous about a man who is nothing to me except my dear friend's son. You know how fond I am of Mrs. Wornock—the only real friend I have made since I left the convent—and you ought to understand that I like her son for her sake. And I have been pleased to take my part in the music they both love. But that is all over now. I will not allow myself to be misconstrued by you, Allan. There shall be no more duets."

They were still in Mrs. Wornock's domain, in a wooded drive where the leafless branches overarched the way; and the scene was lonely enough and sheltered enough to allow of Allan taking his sweetheart to his breast and kissing her in a rapture of penitent love.

"My darling, forgive me! If I did not know the pricelessness of my treasure, I should not be so full of unworthy fears. We won't stop the duets for ever, Suzie. I must get accustomed to the idea of a gifted wife, who has many talents which I have not. But I hope your musical studies at Discombe may be suspended for a month or so. When you go home, you will find a letter from my mother inviting you to Fendyke. She is very fond of you already, and she wants to know more of you, so that you may really be to her the daughter she has been wishing for ever since I was born. You will go, won't you, Suzette, if the good General will spare you; and I think he will?"

"Are you to be there too?"

"Yes, I am to be there; but you shall not see too much of me. Ours is a shooting county, and I shall be expected to be tramping with my gun nearly every day. I think you will like Fendyke. The house is a fine old house, and the neighbourhood is pretty after a fashion, just as some parts of Holland and Belgium are pretty—sleepy, contented, prosperous, useful."

He walked home with her and stayed to luncheon, so as to secure General Vincent's consent upon the spot. This was obtained without difficulty. The General, having had to dispense with his daughter for at least three-fourths of her existence, was not dependent upon her for society, though he liked to see the bright young face smiling at him across the table at his luncheon and his dinner, and he liked to be played to sleep after dinner, or to have Suzette as a listener when he was in the mood for talking. The greater part of his life was spent out-of-doors—hunting, shooting, fishing, golfing—so that he could afford to be amiable upon this occasion.

"Yes, yes, Suzette, accept the invitation, by all means. The change will do you good. Lady Emily is a most estimable person, and it is only right that you should become better acquainted with her."

"I am very fond of her already," said Suzette. "Then I am really to go, Allan? Lady Emily suggests Saturday—three days from now."

"Well, you are ready, I suppose," said her father. "You have the frocks and things that are necessary."

"Yes, father, I think I have frocks enough; unless you are dreadfully fashionable in Suffolk, Allan."

"The less said about our fashion the better. If you have a stout cloth skirt short enough to keep clear of our mud, that is all you need trouble about. I suppose I shall be allowed to escort Suzette, General?"

"Well, yes, I don't see any objection to your taking care of her on the journey; but I have very lax notions of etiquette. I must ask my sister. Suzie will take her maid, of course; and Suzie's maid is a regular dragon."

Allan walked homeward with a light step and a light heart. The idea of having Suzette as a visitor in his own home, growing every day nearer and dearer to his parents, was rapture. No more concertante ducts, no more long-drawn sobbings and sighings on the Stradivarius! He would have his sweetheart all to himself, to pace the level meadow paths and saunter by the modest river and loiter and linger by rustic mills and bridges which Constable may have painted. And in that atmosphere of homely peacefulness he might draw his sweetheart closer to his heart, win her more completely than he had won her yet, and persuade her to consent to a nearer date for their marriage than that far-off summer of the coming year. He counted much on home influences, on his mother's warm-hearted affection for the newly adopted daughter.

"A telegram, sir," said the servant who opened the door, startling him from a happy day-dream. "It came nearly an hour ago."

Allan tore open the envelope and glanced carelessly at the message, expecting some trivial communication.

"Your father is dangerously ill. Come at once. I am writing to postpone Miss Vincent's visit.—Emily Carew."

CHAPTER XIII.

"BEFORE THE NIGHT BE FALLEN ACROSS THY WAY."

A SUDDEN end to a happy day-dream. A hurried preparation and a swift departure. Allan had just time to write to Suzette while his servant was packing a portmanteau and the dogcart horse was being harnessed for the drive to the station.

He loved his father too well to have room for any selfish thoughts about his own disappointment; but he tried to be hopeful and to think that his mother's alarm had exaggerated the evil, and that the word "dangerously" was rather the expression of her own panic than of the doctor's opinion. It was only natural that she should summon him, the only son, to his father's sick-bed. The illness must be appalling in its suddenness; for in her letter, written on the previous day, she had described him as in his usual health. The suddenness of the attack was in itself enough to scare a woman of Lady Emily's temperament.

Allan telegraphed from Liverpool Street, and was met at the quiet little terminus, where the tiny branch line came to an end on the edge of a meadow, and a hundred yards from a rustic road. The journey to Cambridge had been of the swiftest, the twenty miles on the branch line of the slowest; a heart-breaking journey for a man whose mind was racked with fears.

It was dark when he arrived; but out of the darkness which surrounded the terminus there came the friendly voice of a groom and the glare of carriage-lamps.

"Ah, is that you, Moyle? Is my father any better?"

His heart sank as he asked the question, with agonizing dread of the reply.

"No, sir; I'm afraid he ain't no better. The doctor from Abbeytown is coming again to-night. Will you drive, sir?"

"No. Get me home as fast as you can, for God's sake!"

"Yes, sir. I brought your old bay mare. She's the fastest we've got."

"Poor old Kitty! Good to the last, is she? Get on."

They were bowling along the level road behind bay Kitty, the first hunter Allan had bought on his own account in his old college days, when his liberal allowance enabled him to indulge his taste

in horseflesh. Kitty had distinguished herself in a small way as a steeplechaser before Allan picked her up at Tattersall's, and she was an elderly person when he came into his fortune; so he had left her in the home stables as a general utility horse.

Kitty carried him along the road at a splendid pace, and hardly justified impatience even in the most anxious heart.

His mother was waiting in the porch when he alighted.

"Dear mother," he said, as he kissed and soothed her and led her into the house, "why do you stand out in the cold? You are shivering now."

"Not with cold, Allan."

"Poor mother! Is he very ill? Is it really so serious?"

"It could not be more serious, Allan. They thought this morning that he was dying. They told me—to be prepared—for the worst."

The sentence was broken by sobs. She hid her face on her son's breast and sobbed out her grief unchecked by him, only soothed by the gentle pressure of his arm surrounding and, as it were, protecting her from the invincible enemy.

"Doctors are such alarmists, mother; they often take fright too soon."

"Not in this case, Allan; I was with him all through his sufferings. I saw him struggling with death. I knew how near death was in those dreadful hours. It is his heart, Allan. You remember Dr. Arnold's death—how we have cried over the story in Stanley's 'Biography.' It was like that—sudden, bitter suffering. Yesterday he was sitting in his library, placid and thoughtful among his books. We dined together last night. He was cheerful and full of interesting talk. And this morning at daybreak he was fighting for his life. It was terrible."

"But the danger is past, mother. The struggle is over, please God, and he will be well again."

"Never, never again, Allan. The doctors hold out little hope of that. The awful agony may return at any hour. The mischief is deep seated. We have been living in a fool's paradise. Oh, my dear son, I never knew how fondly I have loved your father till to-day. I thought we should grow old together, go down to the grave hand-in-hand."

"Dear mother, hope for the best. I cannot think—remembering how young a man he seemed the other day at Beechhurst—I cannot think that we are to lose him."

Tears were streaming down Allan's cheeks, tears of which he was unconscious. He dearly loved the father whose mild affection had made his childhood and youth so smooth and easy, the father who had entered into and understood every youthful desire, every unexpressed feeling, who in his tenderness and forethought, had been as sympathetic as a loving woman.

"Oh, Allan, you will find him aged by ten years since those happy days at Beechhurst. One day of suffering has altered him. It seems as if some invisible writing—the lines of disease and death—had come suddenly out upon his face—lines I never saw till this day."

"Mother, we won't despair. We are passing through the valley of the shadow of death, perhaps—but only passing through. The fight may be hard and bitter; but we shall conquer the enemy; we shall carry our dearest safely over the dark valley. May I see him? I will be very calm and quiet. I am so longing to see him, to hold his dear hand."

"We ought to wait for the doctors, Allan. They both warned me that he must be kept as quiet as possible. He is terribly exhausted. They will be here at eleven o'clock. It might be safer to wait till then."

"Yes, I will wait. Who is with him now?"

"A nurse from Abbeytown hospital."

"And is he out of pain, and at rest?"

"He was sleeping when I left him—sleeping heavily, worn out with pain, and under the influence of opium."

"Well, we must wait. There is nothing else to be done."

Mother and son waited patiently, almost silently, through the slow hours between eight and eleven. They sat together in Lady Emily's morning-room, which was next to the sick man's bedroom. There was a door of communication, and though this was shut, they could hear if there were much movement in the adjoining room.

Lady Emily mooted the question of dinner for the traveller. She urged him to go down to the dining-room and take some kind of meal after his journey; but he shook his head with the first touch of impatience he had shown since his arrival.

"You will wear yourself out, Allan?" she remonstrated.

"No, mother—there is plenty of wear in me. I almost hate myself for being so strong and so full of life while he is lying there——"

Tears ended the sentence.

At last the hands of the clock, which mother and son had both been watching, pointed to eleven, and the hour struck with slow and silvery chime. Then came ten minutes of expectancy, and then the cautious tread of the family practitioner and the consulting physician coming upstairs together.

Allan and his mother went out to the corridor to see them. A few murmured words only, and the two dark figures vanished through the door of the sick-room, and mother and son were alone once more, waiting, waiting with aching hearts and strained ears, for every sound on the other side of the closed door.

The doctors were some time with the patient, and then they went downstairs, and were closeted together in the library for a time that seemed very long to those who waited for the result of their consultation. Those anxious watchers had followed them downstairs, and were waiting beside the expiring fire in the hall, waiting as for the voice of fate. The dining-room door was open. A table laid for supper, with glass and silver shining under the lamplight, and the glow of a blazing fire, suggested comfort and good cheer —and seemed to accentuate the gloom in the hearts of the watchers.

What were they talking about, those two in the closed room yonder, Allan wondered. Was their talk all of the sufferer upstairs, and the means of staving off the inevitable end; or did they wander from that question of life and death to the futilities of everyday conversation—and so lengthen out the agony of those who were waiting for their verdict. At last the door opened, and they came out into the hall, very grave still, but less gloomy than they had looked in the morning, Lady Emily thought.

"He is better—decidedly better than he was twelve hours ago," said the physician. "We have tided over the immediate peril."

"And he is out of danger?" questioned Allan, eagerly.

"He is out of danger for the moment. He may go on for some time without a recurrence of this morning's attack; but I am bound to tell you that the danger may recur at any time. What has happened must be regarded—I am deeply grieved to be obliged to say it—as the beginning of the end."

There was a silence, broken only by the wife's stifled sobs.

"My God, how sudden it is; and you say it is hopeless!" said Allan, stunned by the sentence of doom.

"To you the thing is sudden; but in reality the mischief is a

work of many years. The evil has been there, suspected by your father, but never fully realized. He consulted me ten years ago, and I gave him the best advice the case allowed—prescribed a regimen which I believe he carefully followed—a regimen which consisted chiefly in quietness and careful living. I told him as much as it was absolutely necessary to tell, taking care not to frighten him."

"You did not tell me that he was a doomed man," Lady Emily said reproachfully.

"My dear lady, to have done that would have been to lessen his chance of cheerful surroundings, to run the risk of sad looks where it was most needful he should find hopefulness. Besides, at that stage of the disease, one might hope for the best—even for a long life, under favourable conditions."

"And now—what is the limit of your hope?" asked Allan.

"I cannot measure the sands in the glass. Another attack like that of to-day would, I fear, be fatal. It is a wonder to me that he survived the agony of this morning."

"And you have told us—that agony may return at any hour. Nothing you can do can prevent its recurrence?"

"I fear not; but we shall do the uttermost."

"May I see him?"

"Not till to-morrow. He is still under the influence of an opiate. Let him rest for to-night undisturbed by one agitating thought. His frame is exhausted by suffering. Mr. Travers will be here again early to-morrow; and if he find his patient as I hope he will find him, then you and Lady Emily can see him for a few minutes. But I must beg that there may be no emotional talk, and that he may be kept very quiet all to-morrow. I will come again early on Saturday."

Mother and son hung upon the physician's words. He was a man whom both trusted, and even in this great strait the idea of other help hardly occurred to either. Yet in the desire to do the uttermost, Allan ventured to say—

"If you would like another opinion, I would telegraph for any one you might suggest—among London specialists."

"A specialist could do nothing more than we have done. The battle is fought and won so far—and when the fight begins again the same weapons will have to be used. The whole college of physicians could do nothing to help us."

And then the doctors went into the dining-room, the physician

to fortify himself for a ten-mile drive, the family practitioner to prepare himself for the possibilities of the night. Allan went in with them, at his mother's urgent request, and tried to eat some supper; but his heart was heavy as lead.

He thought of Mrs. Wornock—remembering that pale face looking out of the autumn night, so intense in its searching gaze, the dark grey eyes seeming to devour the face they looked upon—his father sitting unconscious all the while—knowing not how near love was—the romantic love of his younger years, the love which still held all the elements of poetry, the love which had never been vulgarized or outworn by the fret and jar of daily life.

He would die, perhaps, without ever having seen the face of his early love, without ever having heard the end of her history—die, perhaps, believing that she had given him up easily because she had never really cared for him. The son had felt it in somewise his duty to keep those two apart for his mother's sake; but now at the idea that his father might die without having seen his early love or heard her story from her own lips, it seemed to him that he had acted cruelly and treacherously towards the parent he loved.

There was a further improvement in the patient next morning, and Allan spent the greater part of the day beside his father's bed. There was to be very little conversation; but Allan was told he might read aloud, provided the literature was of an unemotional character. So at his father's request Allan read Chaucer, and the quaint old English verse, with every line of which the patient was familiar, had a soothing and a cheering influence on the tired nerves and brain. There was progress again the day after, and the physician and local watch-dog expressed themselves more than satisfied. The patient might come downstairs on Sunday—might have an airing on the sunniest side of the garden, should there be any sunshine on Monday; but everything was to be done with precautions that too plainly indicated his precarious condition.

"Do you take a more hopeful view than you did the other night?" Allan asked the physician, after the consultation.

"Alas! no. The improvement is greater than I expected; but the substantial facts remain the same. There is deep-seated mischief which may culminate fatally at any time. I should do wrong to conceal the nature of the case—or its worst possibilities from you. It is best you should be prepared for the end—for Lady Emily's sake especially, in order that you may lighten the blow for her."

"And the end is likely to come suddenly?"

"Most likely—better perhaps that it should so come. Your father is prepared for death. He is quite conscious of his danger. Better that the end should be sudden—if it spare him pain?"

"Yes, better so. But it is a hard thing. My father is not forty-eight years of age—in the prime of life, with a fine intellect. It is a hard thing."

"Yes, it is hard, very hard. It seems hard even to me, who have seen so many partings. I think you ought to spare your mother as much as you can. Spare her the agony of apprehension; let her have her husband's last days of sunshine and peace. But it is best that you should know. You are a man, and you can suffer and be strong."

"Yes, I can suffer. He seemed so much better this morning. Might he not go on for years, with the care which we shall take of him?"

"He might—but it is scarcely probable."

"We were to have had a young lady-visitor here to-day," said Allan, with some hesitation, "the lady who is to be my wife. Her visit has been postponed on account of my father's illness; but I am very anxious that she should know more of my father and mother, and I have been wondering if next week we might venture to have her here. She is very gentle and sympathetic, and I know her society would be pleasant to my father."

"I would not risk it, Mr. Carew, if I were you."

"You think it might be bad for my father?"

"I think it might be hazardous for the young lady. Were a fatal end to come suddenly, you would not like the girl you love to be subjected to the horror of the scene, to be haunted perhaps for years by the memory of that one tragic hour. There is no necessity for her presence here. You can go and see her."

"Yes, and risk being absent in my father's dying hours."

"Better that risk than the risk of her unhappiness, should the end come while she were in the house."

"Yes, I suppose that is so; but I can't help hoping that the end may be far off."

The doctor pressed his hand in silence, and nodded good-bye as he stepped into his carriage. It was not for him to forbid hope, even if he knew that it was futile.

CHAPTER XIV.

WHILE LEAVES WERE FALLING.

FONDLY as he loved his betrothed wife, Allan felt that affection and duty alike forbade him to leave his father while the shadow of doom hung over the threshold, while there could be no assurance from day to day that the end would not come before sundown. There had been enough in the physician's manner to crush hopefulness even in the most sanguine breast; and it was in vain that Allan tried to argue within himself against the verdict of learning and experience. He knew in his inmost heart that the physician was right. The ordeal through which George Carew had passed had changed him with the change that too palpably foreshadows the last change of all. In the hollow eyes, the blue-veined forehead and pale lips, in the inert and semi-transparent hands, in the far-off look of the man whose race is run and who has nothing more to do with active life, Allan saw the sign manual of the destroyer. He had need to cherish and garner these quiet days in his father's company, to hang fondly on every word from those pale lips, to treasure each thought as a memory to be hereafter dear and sacred Whatever other love there might be for him upon this earth—even the love of her whom he had made his second self, upon whom he depended for all future gladness, no claim could prevail against the duty that held him here, by the side of the father whose days were numbered.

"I am so glad to have you with me, Allan," Mr. Carew said, in the grave voice which had lost none of its music, though it had lost much of its power. "It seems selfish on my part to keep you here, away from that nice girl, your sweetheart; but though you are making a sacrifice now——"

"No, no, no," interrupted Allan, "it is no sacrifice. I had rather be here than anywhere in the world. Thank God that I am here, that no accident of distance has kept me from you."

"Dear boy, you are so good and true—but it is a sacrifice all the same. This is the spring-time of your life, and you ought to be with the girl who makes your sunshine. It is hard for you two to be parted, and I should like her to be here; only this is a house of gloom. God knows what might happen to chill that young heart.

It is better that you and I should be alone together, prepared for the worst: and in the days to come, in the far-off days, you will be glad to remember how your love lightened every burden for your dying father."

"Father, my dear father!"

The son uttered words of hope, declared his belief that Heaven would grant the dear patient renewed strength; but the voice in which he spoke the words of cheerfulness was broken by sobs.

"My dear Allan, don't be down-hearted. I am resigned to the worst that can happen. I won't say I am glad that the end is near. That would be base ingratitude to the best of wives, to the dearest of sons, and to Providence which has given me so many good things. This world and this life have been pleasant to me, Allan; and it does seem hard to be called away from such peaceful surroundings, from the home where love is, even though through all that life there has run a dark thread. I think you have known that, Allan. I think that sensitive nature of yours has been conscious of the shadow on my days."

"Yes, I have known that there was a shadow."

"A stronger character would have risen superior to the sorrow that has clouded my life, Allan. I have no doubt that some of the greatest and many of the most useful men the world has known have suffered just such a disappointment as I suffered in my early manhood, and have risen superior to their sorrow. You remember how Austin Caxton counsels his son to live down a disappointed love—how he appeals to the lives of men who have conquered sorrow? 'You thought the wing was broken. Tut, tut, 'twas but a bruised feather.' But in my own case, Allan, the wing *was* broken. I had not the mental stamina, I had not the power of rebound which enables a man to rise superior to the sorrow of his youth. I could not forget my first love. I gave up a year of my life to the search for the girl I loved—who had forsaken me in a foolish spirit of self-sacrifice because she had been told that my marriage with her would be social ruin. She was little more than a child in years—quite a child in ignorance of the world, and of the weight and measure of worldly things. We were both cruelly used, Allan. My mother was a good woman, and a woman who would do nothing which she could not reconcile to her own conscience and her own ideas of piety. She acted conscientiously, after her own narrow notions, in bringing about the parting which blighted my youth,

and she thought me a wicked son because for two years of my life I held myself aloof from her."

"And in all that time could you find no trace of your lost love?"

"None. I advertised in English and Continental newspapers, veiling my appeal in language which would mean little to the outside world though it would speak plainly to her. I wandered about the Continent—Italy, Switzerland—all along the Rhine, and the Danube, to every place that seemed to offer a chance of success. I had reason to believe that she had been sent abroad, and I thought that her exile would be fixed in some remote district, out of the beaten track. It may be that my research was conducted feebly. I was out of health for the greater part of my wanderings, and I had no one to help me. Another man in my position might have employed a private detective, and might have succeeded where I failed. I was summoned home by the news of my mother's dangerous illness, and I returned remorseful and unhappy. At the thought that she might die unforgiving and unforgiven, my resentment vanished. I recalled all that my mother had been to my childhood and boyhood, and I felt myself an ungrateful son. Thank God I was home in time to cheer her sick-bed, and to help towards her recovery by the assurance of my unaltered affection. I found that she too had suffered, and I discovered the strength of maternal love under that outward hardness, and allied with those narrow views which had wrecked my happiness. In my gladness at her recovery from a long and dangerous illness, I began to think that the old heart-wound was cured; and when she suggested my marriage with our dear Emily, my amiable playfellow of old, I cheerfully fell in with her views. The union was in every respect suitable, and for me in every respect advantageous. Your mother has been a good and dear wife to me, and never had man less reason to complain against Fate. But there has been the lingering shadow of that old memory, Allan, and you have seen and understood; so it is well you should know all."

Allan tearfully acknowledged the trust confided in him.

"When I am gone, if you care to know the story of my first love, you will find it fully recorded in a manuscript which was written some years ago. Heaven knows what inspired me to go over that old ground, to write of myself almost as I might have written of another man. It was the whim of an idle brain. I felt a strange sad pleasure in recalling every detail of my brief love-story—in conjuring up looks and tones, the very atmosphere of the common-

place surroundings through which my dear love and I moved. No touch of romance, no splendour of scenery, no gaiety of racecourse or public garden made the background of our love. A dull London street, a dull London parlour were all we had for a paradise, and God knows we needed no more. You will smile at a middle-aged man's folly in lingering fondly over the record of his own love-story, instead of projecting himself into the ideal world and weaving a romance of shadows. If I had been a woman, I might have found a diversion for my empty days in writing novels, in every one of which my girlish love and I would have lived again, and loved and parted again, under various disguises. But I had not the feminine love of fiction. It pleased me to write of myself and my love in sober truthfulness. You will read with a mind in touch with mine, Allan; and though you may smile at your father's folly, there will be no scornfulness in your smile."

"My dear, dear father, God knows there will be no smile on these lips of mine if I am to read the story—after our parting. God grant the day for that reading may be far off."

"I will do nothing to hasten it, Allan. Your companionship has helped much to renew my pleasure in life. You can never know how I missed you when this house ceased to be your home. It was different when you were at the University—the short terms, the short distance between here and Cambridge, made parting seem less than parting. But when you had a home of your own, and half a dozen counties divided us, I began to feel that I had lost my only son."

"You had but to summon me."

"I know, I know. But I could not be so selfish as to bring you away from your pleasant surroundings, the prettier country, the more genial climate, your hunting, your falconry, your golf, and your new neighbours. A sick man is a privileged egotist; but even now I feel I am wrong in letting you stay here and lose the best part of the hunting season—to say nothing of that other loss, which, no doubt, you feel more keenly, the loss of your sweetheart's society."

"You need not think about it, father, for I mean to stay. Please regard me as a fixture. If you keep as well next week as you are to-day, I may take a run to Wilts, just to see how Suzette and her father are getting on, and to look round my stable; but I shall be away at most one night."

"Go to-morrow, Allan. I know you are dying to see her."

"Then, perhaps, to-morrow. You really are wonderfully well, are you not?"

"So well that I feel myself an impostor when I am treated as an invalid."

"I may go then; but it will only be to hurry back," said Allan.

His heart beat faster at the thought of an hour with Suzette—an hour in which to look into the frank bright face, to see the truthful eyes looking up at him in all confidence and love, to be assured that the three weeks' absence had made no difference, that not the faintest cloud had come between them in their first parting. Yes, he longed to see her, with a lover's heart-sickness. Deeply, tenderly as he treasured every hour of his father's society, he felt that he must steal just as much time from his home duty as would give him one hour with Suzette.

He pored over time-tables, and so planned his journey as to leave Fendyke in the afternoon of one day, and to return in time for luncheon the day after. This was only to be effected by leaving Matcham at daybreak; but a young man who was in the habit of leaving home in the half-light of a September dawn to ride ten miles to a six-o'clock meet was not afraid of an early train.

He caught a fast evening train for Salisbury, and was at Matcham soon after eight. He had written to General Vincent to announce his intention of looking in after dinner, apologizing in advance for so late a visit. His intention was to take a hasty meal, dress, and drive to Marsh House; but at Beechhurst he found a note from the General inviting him to dinner, postponed till nine o'clock on his account; so he made his toilet in the happiest mood, and arrived at Marsh House ten minutes before the hour.

He found Suzette alone in the drawing-room, and had her all to himself for just those ten minutes which he had gained by extra swiftness at his toilet. For half those minutes he had the gentle fluttering creature in his arms, the dark eyes full of tears, the innocent heart all tenderness and sympathy.

"Why would not you let me go to you, Allan?" she remonstrated. "I wanted to be with you and Lady Emily in your trouble. I hope you don't think I am afraid of sickness or sorrow, where those I love are concerned."

"Indeed, dearest, I give you credit for all unselfishness. But I was advised against your visit. The hazard was too awful."

"What hazard, Allan?"

"The possibility of my father's sudden death."

"Oh, Allan, my poor, poor boy! Is it really as bad as that? How sad for you! And you love him so dearly, I know."

"I hardly knew how dearly till this great terror fell upon me. Nothing less than my love for a father whom I must lose too soon—whom I may lose very soon—would have kept me from you so long, Suzette. And now I am only here for a few hours, to see you, to hear you, to hold you in my arms, and to assure myself that there is such a person; to make quite sure that the Suzette who is in my thoughts by day and in all my dreams by night is not a brilliant hallucination—the creature of my mind and fancy."

"I am very real, I assure you—full of human faults."

"I hope you have a stray failing or two lurking somewhere amongst your perfections; but I have not discovered one yet."

"Ah, Allan, Love would not be Love if he could see."

"Tell me all your news, Suzie. What have you been doing with yourself? Your letters have told me a good deal—dear bright letters, coming like a burst of sunshine into my sad life—but they could not tell me enough. I suppose you have been often at Discombe?"

"Yes, I have been there nearly every day. Mrs. Wornock has been ill and depressed. She will not own to being ill, and I could not persuade her to send for the doctor. But I don't think she could be in such low spirits if she were not ill."

"Poor soul!"

"She is so sympathetic, Allan. She has been as keenly interested in your poor father's illness as if he were her dearest friend. She has been so eager to hear about his progress, and has begged me to read the passages in your letters which refer to him. She is so tender-hearted, and enters so fully into other people's sorrows."

"And you have been much with her, and have done all in your power to cheer her, no doubt."

"I have done what I could. We have made music together; but she has not taken her old delight in playing, or in listening to me. She has become dreamy and self-absorbed. I am sure she is out of health."

"And her son, for whose company she was pining all the summer? Has not he been able to cheer her spirits?"

"I hardly know about that. Mr. Wornock is out hunting all day and every day. He has increased his stud since you left, and hunts with three packs of hounds. He comes home after dark,

sometimes late for dinner. He and his mother spend the evening together, and no doubt that is her golden hour."

"And has Wornock given up his violin practice?"

"He plays for an hour after dinner sometimes, when he is not too tired."

"And your musical mornings? Have there been no more of those—no more concertante duets?"

"Allan, I told you that there should be no more such duets for me."

"You might have changed your mind."

"Not after having promised. I considered that a promise."

"Conscientious soul! And you think me a jealous brute, no doubt?"

"I don't think you a brute."

"But a jealous idiot. My dearest, I don't think I am altogether wrong. A wife—or a betrothed wife—should have no absorbing interest outside her husband's or her sweetheart's life; and music is an absorbing interest, a chain of potent strength between two minds. When I heard those impassioned strains on the fiddle, and your tender imitations on the piano, question and answer, question and answer, for ever repeating themselves, and breathing only love——"

"Oh, Allan, what an ignoramus you are! Do you suppose musical people ever think of anything but the music they are playing?"

"They may not think, but they must feel. They can't help being borne along on that strong current."

"No, no; they have no time to be vapourish or sentimental. They have to be cool and business-like; every iota of one's brain-power is wanted for the notes one is playing, the transitions from key to key—so subtle as to take one by surprise—the changes of time, the syncopated passages which almost take one's breath away—— Hark! there is my aunt. Father asked her in to support me. Uncle Mornington is in London, and she is alone at the Grove."

"I think we could have done without her, Suzie."

Mrs. Mornington's resonant voice was heard in the hall while she was taking off her fur cloak, and the lady appeared a minute later, in a serviceable black-velvet gown, with diamonds twinkling and trembling in her honiton cap, jovial and hearty as usual.

"You poor fellow! I'm very glad to see you," she said, shaking hands with Allan. "I hope your father is better. Of course he is,

though, or you wouldn't be here. It's five minutes past nine, Suzie, and as I am accustomed to get my dinner at half-past seven, I hope your cook means to be punctual. Oh, here's my brother, and dinner is announced. Thank goodness!"

General Vincent welcomed his future son-in-law, and the little party went into the cosy dining-room, where Suzette looked her prettiest in the glow of crimson shaded lamps, which flecked her soft white gown and her pretty white neck with rosy lights. Conversation was so bright and cheerful among these four that Allan's thoughts reverted apprehensively now and again to the quiet home in Suffolk and the dark shadow hanging over it. He felt as if there were a kind of treason against family affection in this interlude of happiness, and yet he could not help being happy with Suzette. To-morrow, in the early grey of a wintry morning, he would be on his way back to his father.

After dinner Mrs. Mornington established herself in an armchair close to the drawing-room fire, and had so much to say to her brother about Matcham sociology that Allan and his sweetheart, seated by the piano at the other end of the room, were as much alone as if they had been in one of the Discombe copses. No better friend than a piano to lovers who want to be quiet and confidential Suzette sat before the keyboard and played a few bars now and then, like a running commentary on the conversation.

"You will say all that is kind and nice to Mrs. Wornock for me?" Allan said, after a good deal of other and tenderer talk.

"Yes, I will tell her how kindly you spoke of her; but the best thing I can tell her is that your father is better. She has been so intensely interested about him. I have felt very sorry for her since you went away, Allan."

"Why?"

"Because I cannot help seeing that her son's return has not brought her the happiness she expected. She has been thinking of him and hoping for his coming for years—empty, desolate years, for until she attached herself to you and me she had really no one she cared for. Strange, was it not, that she should take such a fancy to you, and then extend her friendly feeling to me?"

"Yes, it was strange, undoubtedly. But I believe I owe her kindly feeling entirely to my very shadowy likeness to her son."

"No doubt that was the beginning; but I am sure she likes you for your own sake. You are only second to her son in her affection; and I know she is disappointed in her son."

"I hope he is not unkind to her."

"Unkind! No, no, he is kindness itself. His manner to his mother is all that it should be; affectionate, caressing, deferential. But he is such a restless creature, so eager for change and movement. Clever and amiable as he is, there is something wanting in his character; the want of repose, I believe. He hardly ever rests; and there is no rest where he is. He excites his mother, and he doesn't make her happy. Perhaps it is better for her that he is so seldom at home. She is too highly strung to endure his unquiet spirit."

"You like him though, don't you, Suzette, in spite of his faults?"

"Oh, one cannot help liking him. He is so bright and clever; and he has all his mother's amiability; only, like her, he has just a touch of eccentricity—but I hardly like to call it that. A German word expresses it better; he is *überspannt*."

"He is what our American friends call a crank," said Allan, relieved to find his sweetheart could speak so lightly of the man who had caused him his first acquaintance with jealousy.

CHAPTER XV.

"LET NO MAN LIVE AS I HAVE LIVED."

ALLAN went back to Suffolk, and Suzette's life resumed its placid course; a life in which she had for the most part to find her own amusements and occupations. General Vincent was fond and proud of his daughter; but he was not a man to make a companion of a daughter, except at the social board. If Suzette were at home at twelve o'clock to superintend the meal which he called tiffin, and in her place in the drawing-room a quarter of an hour before the eight-o'clock dinner; if she played him to sleep after dinner, or allowed herself to be beaten at chess whenever he fancied an evening game, she fulfilled the whole duty of a daughter as understood by General Vincent. For the rest he had a supreme belief in her high principles and discretion. Her name on the tableau in the parlour at the Sacré Cœur had stood forth conspicuously for all the virtues—order, obedience, propriety, truthfulness. The nuns, who expect perfection in the young human vessel, had discovered no crack or flaw in Suzette.

"She has not only amiability and kindness of heart," said the Reverend Mother, at the parting interview with the pupil's father. "She has plenty of common sense, and she will never give you any trouble."

When the General took his daughter to India, there had been some talk of a companion-governess, or governess-companion, for Suzette; but against this infliction the girl herself protested strongly.

"If I am not old enough or wise enough to take care of myself, I will go back to the convent," she declared. "I would rather take the veil than submit to be governed by a 'Mrs. General.' I had learnt everything the nuns could teach me before I left the Sacré Cœur. I am not going to be taught by an inferior teacher—some smatterer, perhaps. Nobody can teach like the sisters of the Sacré Cœur."

General Vincent had been preached at by his female relatives on this subject of the governess-companion. "Suzette is too young and too pretty to be alone," said one. "Suzette will get into idle habits if there is no one to direct her mind," said another. "A girl's education has only begun when she leaves school," said a third, as gloomy in their foreshadowing of evil as if they had been the three fatal sisters. But the General loved his daughter, and when withdrawing her from the convent had promised her that her life should be happy; so he abandoned an idea that had never been his own.

"A Mrs. General would have been a doosid expensive importation," he told his friends afterwards, "and I knew there would be plenty of nice women to look after Suzie."

Suzette had proved quite capable of looking after herself, unaided by the nice women; indeed, her conduct had been—or should have been—a liberal education to more than one of those nice women, who might have found their matronly exuberances of conversation and behaviour in a manner rebuked by the girl's discretion and self-respect. Suzette passed unsmirched through the furnace of a season at Simla, and a season at Naini Tal, and came to rustic Wiltshire with all the frank gaiety of happy girlhood, and all the *savoir faire* which comes of two years' society experience. She had been courted and wooed, and had blighted the hopes of more than one eligible admirer.

When she came to Matcham, there was again a question of chaperon or companion. The odious word governess was abandoned. But it was said that Indian society was less conventional

than English society, and that what might be permitted at Simla could hardly be endured in Wiltshire; and again Suzette threatened to go back to her convent if she were not to be trusted with the conduct of her own life.

"If I cannot take care of myself I am only fit for a cloister," she said. "I would rather be a lay sister, and scrub floors, than be led about by some prim personage, paid to keep watch and ward over me, a hired guardian of my manners and my complexion."

Mrs. Mornington, who was less conventional than the rest of the General's womankind, put in her word for her niece.

"Suzette wants no chaperon while I am living within five minutes' walk," she said. "She can come to me in all her little domestic difficulties; and as for parties, she is not likely to be asked to any ceremonious affair to which I shall not be asked too."

Mrs. Mornington had been as kind and helpful as she had promised to be; and in all domestic cruxes, in all details of home life, in the arrangement of a dinner or the purchase of household goods Suzette had taken counsel with her aunt. The meadows appertaining to the Grove and to Marsh House were conterminous, and a gate had been made in the fence, so that Suzette could run to her aunt at any hour, without hat or gloves, and without showing herself on the high-road.

"If ever we quarrel, that gate will have to be nailed up," said Mrs. Mornington. "It makes a quarrel much more awful when there is a communication of that kind. The walling up of a gate is a public manifesto. If ever we bar each other out, Suzette, all Matcham will know it within twenty-four hours."

Suzette was not afraid that the gate would have to be nailed up. She was fond of her aunt, and fully appreciated that lady's hard-headed qualities; but although she went to her aunt Mornington for advice about the gardener and the cook, the etiquette of invitations and the law of selection with reference to a dinner-party, it was to Mrs. Wornock she went for sympathy in the higher needs of life; it was to Mrs. Wornock she revealed the mysteries of her heart and her imagination.

"I seem to have known you all my life," she told that lady; "and I am never afraid of being troublesome."

"You never can be troublesome," Mrs. Wornock answered, looking at her with admiring affection. "I don't know what I should do without you, Suzette. You and Allan have given my poor worn-out life a new brightness."

"Allan! How fond you are of Allan," Suzette said, musingly. "It seems so strange that you should have taken him to your heart so quickly—only because he is like your son."

"Not only on that account, Suzette. That was the beginning. I am fond of Allan for his own sake. His fine character has endeared him to me."

"You think he has a fine character?"

"Think! I know he has. Surely you know him too, Suzie. You ought to have learnt his value by this time."

"Yes, I know he is good, generous, honest, and true. His love for his father is very beautiful—and yet he found time to come all this way to spend an hour or two with unworthy frivolous me."

"He did not think that a sacrifice, Suzie, for he adores you."

"You really think so—that he cares as much as that?"

"I am very sure that he loves with his whole heart and mind, as his father—may have done before him."

"Oh, his father would have been in earnest, I have no doubt, in any affection; but I doubt if he was ever tremendously in love with Lady Emily. She is all that is sweet and dear in her frank homely way, but not a person to inspire a *grande passion*. Allan's father must have loved and lost in his early youth. There is a shade of melancholy in his voice and manner—nothing gloomy or dismal—but just that touch of seriousness which tells of deep thoughts. He is a most interesting man. I wish you could have seen him while he was at Beechhurst. I fear he will never leave Fendyke again."

Mrs. Wornock sighed and sat silent, while Suzette went to the piano and played a short fugue by their favourite Sebastian Bach—played with tender touch, lengthening out every slow passage in her pensive reverie.

There had been no more concertante duets. Geoffrey had entreated her to go on with their mutual study of De Beriot and the older composers, Corelli, Tartini, and the rest; but she had obstinately refused.

"The music is difficult and tiring," she said.

This was her first excuse.

"We will play simpler music—the lightest we can find. There are plenty of easy duets."

"Please don't think me capricious if I confess that I don't care about playing with the violin. It takes too much out of one. I am too anxious."

"Why should you be anxious? I am not going to be angry or disagreeable at your *brioches*—should you make any."

She still refused, lightly but persistently; and he saw that she had made up her mind.

"I begin to understand," he said, with an offended air; and there was never any further talk of Suzette as an accompanyist.

Geoffrey was seldom at home in the daytime after this refusal, and life at the Manor dropped back into the old groove. Mrs. Wornock and Suzette spent some hours of every day together; and, now that the weather often made the garden impossible, the organ and piano afforded their chief occupation and amusement. Suzette was enthusiastic, and pleased with her own improvement under her friend's guidance. It was not so much tuition as sympathy which the elder woman gave to the younger. Suzette's musical talent, since she left her convent, had been withering in an atmosphere of chilling indifference. Her father liked to be played to sleep after dinner; but he hardly knew one air from another, and he called everything his daughter played Rubinstein.

"Wonderful fellow that Rubinstein!" he used to say. "There seems no end to his compositions; and, to my notion, they've only one fault—they're all alike."

Suzette heard of Geoffrey, though she rarely saw him. His mother talked of him daily; but there was a regretful tone in all her talk. Nothing at Discombe seemed quite satisfactory to the son and heir. His horses were failures. The hunting was bad—"rotten," Geoffrey called it, but could give no justification for this charge of rottenness. The sport might be good enough for the neighbours in general; but it was not good enough for a man who had run the whole gamut of sport in Bengal, under the best possible conditions. Geoffrey doubted if there was any hunting worth talking about, except in the shires or in Ireland. He thought of going to Ireland directly after Christmas.

"He is bored and unhappy here, Suzette," Mrs. Wornock said one morning, when Suzette found her particularly low-spirited. "The life that suits Allan, and other young men in the neighbourhood, is not good enough for Geoffrey. He has been spoilt by Fortune, perhaps—or it is his sad inheritance. I was an unhappy woman when he was born, and a portion of my sorrow has descended upon my son."

This was the first time she had ever spoken to Suzette of her past life or its sorrows.

"You must not think that, dear Mrs. Wornock. Your son is tired of this humdrum country life, and he'll be all the better and brighter for a change. Let him go to Ireland and hunt. He will be so much the fonder of you when he comes back."

Mrs. Wornock sighed, and began to walk about the room in a restless way. "Oh, Suzette, Suzette, she said, "I am very unhappy about him. I don't know what will become of us, my son and me. We have all the elements of happiness, and yet we are not happy."

It was a month after the little dinner at Marsh House, and Suzette and her sweetheart had not met since that evening. There had been no change for the better in Mr. Carew's condition; and Allan had felt it impossible to leave the father over whose dwindling hours the shadow of the end was stealing—gently, gradually, inevitably. There were days when all was hushed and still as at the approach of doom—when the head of the household lay silent and exhausted within closed doors, and all Allan could do was to comfort his mother in her aching anxiety. This he did with tenderest thoughtfulness, cheering her, sustaining her, tempting her out into the gardens and meadows, beguiling her to temporary forgetfulness of the sorrow that was so near. There were happier—or seemingly happier days—when the invalid was well enough to sit in his library, among the books which had been his life-companions. In these waning hours he could only handle his books, fondle them, as it were, slowly turning the leaves, reading a paragraph here and there, or pausing to contemplate the outside of a volume, in love with a tasteful binding, the creamy vellum, or gold diapered back, the painted edges, the devices to which he had given such careful thought in the uneventful years, when collecting and rebinding these books had been the most serious business of his life. He laid down one volume and took up another, capriciously—sometimes with an impatient, sometimes with a regretful, sigh. He could not read more than a page without fatigue. His eyes clouded and his head ached at any sustained exertion. His son kept him company through the grey winter day, in the warm glow of the luxurious room, sheltered by tapestry portières and tall Indian screens. His son fetched and carried for him, between the book-table by the hearth and the shelves that lined the room from floor to ceiling, and filled an ante-room beyond, and overflowed into the corridor.

"My day is done," George Carew said with a sigh. "These books have been my life, Allan, and now I have outlived them.

The zest is gone out of them all; and now in these last days I know what a mistake my life has been. Let no man live as I have done, and think that he is wise. A life without variety or action is something less than life. Never envy the student his peaceful meditative days. Be sure that when the end is near he will look back, as I do, and feel that he has wasted his life—yes, even though he leave some monumental work which the world will treasure when he is in the dust—monument more enduring than brass, grander than marble. The man himself, when the shadows darken round him, will know how much he has lost. Life means action, Allan, and variety, and the knowledge of this glorious world into which we are born. The student is a worm and no man. Let no sorrow or disappointment ever blight your life as mine has been blighted."

"Dear father, I have always known there was a cloud upon your life—but at least you have made others happy—as husband, father, master——"

"I have not been a domestic tyrant. That is about the best I can say for myself. I have been tolerably indulgent to the kindest of wives. I have loved my only son. Small merits these in a man whose home-life has been cloudless. But I might have done better, Allan. I might have risen superior to that youthful sorrow. I might have taken my dear Emily closer to my heart, travelled over this varied world with her, shown her all that is strangest and fairest under far-off skies instead of letting her vegetate here. I might have gone into Parliament, put my shoulder to the wheel of progress—helped as other men help, with unselfish toil, struggling on hopefully through the great dismal swamp of mistake and muddle-headedness. Better, far better, any life of laborious endeavour, even if futile in result, than the cultured idlers' paradise—better far for me, since in such a life I should have forgotten the past, and might have been a cheerful companion in the present. I chose to feed my morbid fancies; to live the life of retrospection and introspection; and now that the end has come, I begin to understand what a contemptible creature I have been."

"Contemptible! My dear father, if every student were so to upbraid himself after a life of plain living and high thinking, such as you have led——"

"Plain living and high thinking are of very little good, Allan, if they result in no useful work. Plain living and high thinking may be only a polite synonym for selfish sloth."

"Father, I will not hear you depreciate yourself."

"My dear son! It is something to have won your love."

"And my mother. Is it not something to have made her happy?"

"For that I must thank her own sweet disposition. My reproach is that I might have made her happier. I have wronged her by brooding over an old sorrow."

"She has not been jealous of the love that came before you belonged to her. She loves and honours you."

"Far beyond my merits. Providence has been very good to me, Allan."

There was a silence. More books were asked for and brought, languidly opened, languidly closed, and laid aside. Yes, the zest had gone out of them. The languor of excessive weakness can find no beauty even in things most beautiful.

CHAPTER XVI.

"CHANCE CANNOT CHANGE MY LOVE, NOR TIME IMPAIR."

SUZETTE endured her lover's absence with a philosophical cheerfulness which somewhat surprised her aunt.

"Upon my word, Suzie, I am half inclined to think that you don't care a straw for Allan," Mrs. Mornington exclaimed one day, when her niece came singing across the wintry lawn, crisp under her footsteps after the morning frost.

Suzette looked angrier than her aunt had ever seen her look till this moment.

"Auntie, how can you say anything so horrid? Not care for Allan! When he is in sad trouble, too! This morning's letter gives a most melancholy account of his father. I fear the end must be very near. It was very wrong of me to come running and singing over the grass; but these frosty mornings are so delicious. Look at that glorious blue up there!"

"And when all is over, Allan will come back to you, I suppose? I must say you have endured the separation in the calmest way."

"Why should I make myself unhappy about it? I know that it is Allan's duty to be at Fendyke. The only thing I regret is that I can't be there too, to cheer him a little in his sorrow."

"And you do not mind being parted from him. You can live without him?"

Suzette smiled at the sentimental question from the lips of her practical aunt, whose ideas seemed rarely to soar above the daily cares of housekeeping and the considerations of twopence as against twopence halfpenny.

"I have had to live without him over twenty years, auntie."

"Yes, but I thought that the moment a girl was engaged she found life impossible in the absence of her sweetheart."

"I think that kind of girl must be very empty-headed."

"And your little brains are well furnished—and then you have Mrs. Wornock and her son to fill up your days," said Mrs. Mornington, with a searching look.

"I have Mrs. Wornock, and I am very fond of her. I see very little of Mrs. Wornock's son."

"Where is he, then? I thought he was at the Manor."

"He is seldom at home in the daytime, and I am never there in the evening."

"And so you never meet. You are like Box and Cox. So much the more satisfactory for Allan, I should say."

"Really, aunt, you are in a most provoking mood this morning. I'm afraid the butcher's book must be heavier than it ought to be."

It was Tuesday—Mrs. Mornington's terrible day—the day on which the tradesmen's books came up for judgment; a day on which the cook trembled, and even the housemaids felt the electricity in the atmosphere.

"Seven and twenty shillings higher than it ought to be," said the lady; "but that isn't what set me thinking about you and Allan. I have been thinking about you for ever so long. I'm afraid you are not so fond of him as you ought to be."

"Auntie, you have no right to say that."

"Why not, pray, miss?"

"Because, perhaps, if you had not urged me to accept him, I might not have said 'Yes' when he asked me the second time. Oh, pray don't look so frightened. I am very fond of him—very fond of him. I know that he is good and true and kind, and that he loves me better than I deserve to be loved, and thinks me better than I am—cleverer, prettier, altogether superior to my work-a-day self. And it is very sweet to have a lover who thinks of one in that exalted way. But I am not romantically in love, auntie. I don't believe that it is in my nature to be romantic. I see the bright and happy side of life. I see things to laugh at. I am not sentimental."

"Well, I dare say Allan can get on without sentiment, so long as he knows you like him better than anybody else in the world; and now, as there is no reason whatever for delay, the sooner you marry him the better."

"I am afraid he will lose his father before long, auntie; and then he can't marry for at least a year."

"Nonsense, child. He won't be a widow. I dare say Lady Emily will be marrying by that time. Three months will be quite long enough for Allan to wait. You can make the wedding as quiet as you like."

Suzette did not prolong the argument. The subject was too remote to need discussion. Mrs. Mornington went back to her tradesmen's books, and Suzette left her absorbed in the calculation of legs and sirloins, and the deeper mystery of soup meat and gravy beef.

Christmas had come and gone, a very tranquil season at Matcham, marked only by the decoration of the church and the new bonnets in the tradespeople's pews. It was a dull, grey day at the end of the year, the last day but one, and Suzette was walking home in the early dusk after what she called a long morning with Mrs. Wornock, a long morning which generally lasted till late in the afternoon. But these mid-winter days were too short to allow of Suzette walking home alone after tea; so unless her own or her aunt's pony-carriage was coming for her, she left Mrs. Wornock before dusk.

To-day Mrs. Wornock had been sadder even than her wont, as if saddened by the last news from Fendyke, and sorrowing for Allan's loss; so Suzette had stayed longer than usual, and as she walked homeward the shadows of evening began to fall darkly, and the leafless woods looked black against the faint pale saffron of the western sky. The sun had shown himself only an hour before his setting, a pale and wintry sun.

Presently in the stillness she heard horses' hoofs walking slowly on the moist road, and the next turn in the path showed her Geoffrey Wornock, in his red coat, leading his horse.

It was the first time they had met since her refusal to play any more duets with him, and, without knowing why, she felt considerable embarrassment at the meeting, and was sorry when he stopped to shake hands with her, stopped as if he meant to enter into conversation.

"Going home alone in the dark, Miss Vincent?"

"Yes; the darkness comes upon one unawares in these short winter days. I stayed with Mrs. Wornock because she seemed out of spirits. I am glad you are home early to cheer her."

"That is tantamount to saying you are glad I have lamed my horse. I should be on the other side of Andover, in one of the best runs of the season, if it were not for that fact. When one is thrown out, the run is always quite the best—or so one's dear friends tell one afterwards."

"I am sorry for your horse. I hope he isn't much hurt?"

"I don't know. Lameness in a horse is generally an impenetrable mystery. One only knows that he is lame. The stable will find half a dozen theories to account for it, and the vet will find a seventh, and very likely they may all be wrong. I'll walk with you to the high-road at least."

"And give the poor horse extra work. Not for the world!"

"Then I'll take him on till I am within halloo of the stables, and then come back to you, if you'll walk on very slowly."

"Pray don't! I am not at all afraid of the dusk."

"Please walk slowly," he answered, looking back at her and hurrying on with his horse.

Suzette was vexed at his persistence; but she did not want to be rude to him, were it only for his mother's sake. How much better it would have been had he gone straight home to cheer that fond mother by his company, instead of wasting his time by walking to Matcham, as he would perhaps insist upon doing.

He looked white and haggard, Suzette thought; but that might only be the effect of the dim, grey light, or it might be that he was tired after a laborious day. She had not much time to think about him. His footsteps sounded on the road behind her. He was running to overtake her. It occurred to her that she might turn this persistence of his to good account. She might talk to him about his mother, and urge him to spend a little more of his time at home, and do a little more to cheer that lonely life.

"I met one of the lads," he said, "and got rid of that poor brute."

"I am so sorry you should think it necessary to come with me."

"You mean you are sorry that I should snatch a brief and perilous joy—half an hour in your company—after having abstained from pleasure and peril so long."

"If you are going to talk nonsense, I shall go back to the house and ask your mother to send me home in her brougham."

"Then I won't talk nonsense. I don't want to offend you; and you are so easily offended. Something offended you in our duets. What was it, I wonder? Some ignorant sin of mine? some passage played *troppo appassionato*? some long-lingering chord that sounded like a sigh from an over-laden heart? Did the music speak too plainly, Suzette?"

"This is too bad of you!" exclaimed Suzette, pale with anger. "You take a mean advantage of finding me alone here. I won't walk another step with you!"

She turned and walked quickly in the opposite direction as she spoke; but she was some distance from the house, at least ten minutes' walk, and her heart sank at the thought of how much Geoffrey Wornock could say to her in ten minutes. Her heart was beating violently, louder and faster than she had ever felt it beat. Did it matter so much what nonsense he might talk to her—mere idle froth from idle lips? Yes, it seemed to her to matter very much. She would be guilty of unpardonable treason to Allan if she let this man talk. It seemed to her as if these wild words of his—mere rodomontade—made an epoch in her life.

He seized her by the arm with passionate vehemence, but not roughly.

"Suzette! Suzette! you must—you shall hear me!" he said. "Go which way you will, I go with you. I did not mean to speak. I have tried—honestly—to avoid you. Short of leaving this place altogether, I have done my uttermost. But Fate meant us to meet, you see. Fate lamed my horse—the soundest hunter of them all. Fate sent you by this lonely path at the nick of time. You shall hear me! Say what you like to me when you have heard. Be as hard, as cruel, as constant to your affianced lover as you please; but you shall know that you have another lover—a lover who has been silent till to-night, but who loves you with a love which is his doom. Who says that about love and doom? Shakespeare or Tennyson, I suppose. Those two fellows have said everything."

"Mr. Wornock, you are very cruel," she faltered. "You know how dearly I love your mother, and that I wouldn't for the world do anything to wound her feelings, but you are making it impossible for me ever to enter her house again."

"Why impossible? You are trembling, Suzette. Oh, my love! my dear, dear girl, you tremble at my touch. My words go home

to your heart. Suzette, that other man has not all your heart. If he had, you would not have been afraid to go on with our music. If your heart was his, Orpheus himself could not have moved you."

"I was not afraid. You are talking nonsense. I left off playing because Allan did not like to see me absorbed in an occupation which he could not share. It was my duty to defer to his opinion."

"Yes, he heard, he understood. He knew that my heart was going out to you—my longing, passionate heart. He could read my mystery, though you could not. Suzette, is it hopeless for me? Is he verily and indeed the chosen? Or do you care for him only because he came to you first—when you knew not what love means? You gave yourself lightly, because he is what people call a good fellow. He cannot love you as I love you, Suzette. Love is something less than all the world for him. No duty beside a father's sick-bed would keep me from my dearest, if she were mine. I would be your slave. I could live upon one kind word a month, if only I might be near you to behold and adore."

He had released her arm, but he was walking close by her side, still in the direction of the Manor House, she hurrying impetuously, trying to conquer her agitation, trying to make light of his foolishness, and yet deeply moved.

"You are very unkind," she said at last, with a piteousness that was like the complaint of a child.

"Unkind! I am a miserable wretch pleading for life, and you call me unkind. Suzette, have pity on me! I have not succumbed without a struggle. I loved you from the hour we met—from that first hour when my heart warmed in the sunlight of your eyes. On looking back, it seems to me now that I must have so loved you from the beginning. I can recall no hour in which I did not love you. But I have fought the good fight, Suzette. Self-banished from the presence I love, I have lived between earth and sky, until, though I have something of the sportsman's instinct, I have come almost to hate the music of the hounds and the call of the huntsman's horn, because in every mile my horse galloped he was carrying me further from you, and every hour I spent far afield was an hour I might have spent with you."

"It is cruel of you to persecute me like this."

"No, no, Suzette; you must not talk of persecution. If I am rough and vehement to-night, it is because I am resolute to ask the question that has been burning on my lips ever since I knew you.

I will not be put off from that. But once the question asked and answered I have done, and, if it must be so, you have done with me. There shall be no such thing as persecution. I am here at your side, your devoted lover—no better man than Allan Carew, but I think as good a man, with as fair a record, of as old and honourable a race, richer in this world's gear; but that's not much to such a woman as Suzette. It is for you to choose between us; and it is not because you said yes to him before you had ever seen my face that you are to say no to me, if there is the faintest whisper in your heart that pleads for me against him."

She stood silent, her eyelids drooping over eyes that were not tearless. His words thrilled her, as his violin had thrilled her sometimes in some lingering, plaintive passage of old-world music. His face was near hers, and his hand was on her shoulder, detaining her.

The intellectuality, the refinement of the delicately chiselled features, the pallor of the clear complexion were intensified by the dim light. She could not but feel the charm of his manner.

He was like Allan—yet how unlike! There was a fascination in this face, a music in this voice, which were wanting in Allan, frank, and bright, and honest, and true though he was. There was in this man just the element of poetry and unreasoning impulse which influences a woman in her first youth more than all the manly virtues that ever went to the making of the Christian Hero.

Suzette had time to feel the power of that personal charm before she collected herself sufficiently to answer him with becoming firmness. For some moments she was silent, under the influence of a spell which she knew must be fatal to her peace and Allan's happiness, should she weakly yield. No, she would not be so poor, so fickle a creature. She would be staunch and true, worthy of Allan's love and of her father's confidence.

"Why, if I were to palter with the situation," she thought—"if I were to play fast and loose with Allan, my father might think he had been mistaken in trusting me without a chaperon. He would never respect me or believe in me again. And Allan? What could Allan think of me were I capable of betraying him?"

Her heart turned cold at the idea of his indignation, grief, disgust at woman's perfidy. She knew not whether anger or sorrow would prevail.

She conquered her agitation with an effort, and answered this troublesome lover as lightly as she could. She did not want

Geoffrey to know how he had shaken her nerves by this unexpected appeal.

She knew now, standing by his side, with that eloquent face so near her own, that musical voice pleading to her—she knew how often his image had been present to her thoughts at Discombe Manor, while he himself was away.

"It is very foolish of you to waste such big words upon another man's sweetheart," she said. "Pray believe that when I accepted Allan Carew as my future husband, I accepted him once and for ever. There was no question of seeing some one else a little later, and liking some one else a little better. There may be girls who do that sort of thing; but I should be sorry that anybody could think me capable of such inconstancy. Allan Carew and I belong to each other for the rest of our lives."

"Is that a final answer, Miss Vincent?"

"Absolutely final."

"Then I can say no more, except to ask your forgiveness for having said too much already. If you will go on to the house, and talk to my mother for a few minutes, I'll go to the stables and order the brougham to take you home. It is too dark for you to walk home alone."

There was no occasion for the brougham. A pair of lamps in the drive announced the arrival of Miss Vincent's pony-cart, which had been sent to fetch her.

CHAPTER XVII.

AT EVENSONG.

THE windows were darkened at Fendyke. The passing bell had tolled the years of the life that was done, sounding solemnly and slowly across the level fields, the deep narrow river, the mill-streams and pine-woods, the scattered hamlets lying far apart on the great flat, where the sunsets linger late and long. All was over, and Allan had to put aside his own sorrow in order to comfort his mother, who was heart-broken at the loss of a husband she had idolized, with a love so quiet and unobtrusive, so little given to sentimental utterances, that it might have been mistaken for indifference.

She wandered about the darkened house like some lost soul in

the dim under-world, unable to think of anything, or to speak of anything but her loss. She looked to Allan for everything, asserted her authority in no detail.

"Let all be as he wished," she said to her son. "Let us think only of pleasing him. You know what he would like, Allan. You were with him so much towards the last. He talked to you so freely. Think only of him, and of his wishes."

She could not divest herself of the idea that her husband was looking on at all that happened, that this or that arrangement might be displeasing to him. She was sure that he would wish the sternest simplicity as to the funeral. His own farm-labourers were to carry him to his grave, and the burial was to be at dusk. He had himself prescribed those two conditions. He wished to be laid in his grave at set of sun, when the hireling's daily toil was over, and the humblest of his neighbours could have leisure to follow him to his last bed. And then he had quoted Parson Hawker's touching lines:—

"Sunset should be the time, they said,
To close their brother's narrow bed.
'Tis at that pleasant hour of day
The labourer treads his homeward way;
His work is o'er, his toil is done,
And therefore at the set of sun,
To wait the wages of the dead,
We lay our hireling in his bed."

Those lines were written for the tillers of the earth; but George Carew's thoughts of himself were as humble as if he had been the lowest of day labourers. Indeed, in those closing hours of life, when the record of a man's existence is suddenly spread out before him like the scroll which the prophet laid before the king, there is much in that comprehensive survey to humiliate the proudest of God's servants, much which makes him who has laboured strenuously despair at the insufficiency of the result, the unprofitableness of his labour. How, then, could such a man as George Carew fail to perceive his unworthiness?—a man who had let life go by him, who had done nothing, save by a careless automatic beneficence, to help or better his fellow-men, to whom duty had been an empty word, and the Christian religion a lifeless formula.

The Squire of Fendyke was laid to rest in the pale twilight of early March, the winter birds sounding their melancholy evensong as the coffin was lowered into the grave. The widow and her son

stood side by side, with those humbler neighbours and dependents clustering round them. No one had been bidden to the funeral, no hour had been named, and the gentry of the district, whose houses lay somewhat wide apart, knew nothing of the arrangements till afterwards. There were no empty carriages to testify to the decent grief which stays at home, while liveried servants offer the tribute of solemn faces and black gloves. Side by side Lady Emily and her son walked through the grounds of Fendyke to the churchyard adjoining. The wintry darkness had fallen gently on those humble graves when the last "Amen" had been spoken, and mother and son turned slowly and sadly towards the desolate home.

Allan stayed in his mother's sitting-room till after midnight, talking of their dead. Lady Emily found a sad pleasure in talking of the husband she had lost, in dwelling fondly upon his virtues, his calm and studious life, his non-interference with her household arrangements, his perfect contentment with the things that satisfied her.

"There never was a better husband, Allan," she said, with a tearful sigh, "and yet I know I was not his first love."

"Not his first love. Alas! no, poor soul," mused Allan, when he had bidden his mother good night, and was seated alone in front of his father's bureau, alone in the dead middle of the night, steeped in the vivid light of the large reading-lamp, under its spreading silken shade, while all the rest of the room was in shadow.

"Not his first love! Poor mother. It is happy for you that you know not how near that first love was to being the last and only love of your husband's life. Thank God you did not know."

Often in those quiet days in the old Suffolk manor house, while his father was gradually fading out of life, Allan had argued with himself as to whether it was or was not his duty to reveal Mrs. Wornock's identity with the woman to whom George Carew had dedicated a lifetime of regret, and to give his father the option of summoning that sad ghost out of the past, of clasping once again the vanished hand, and hearing the voice that had so long been unheard. There would have been rapture, perhaps, to the dying man in one brief hour of re-union; but that hour could not give back youth, or youthful dreams. There would have been the irony of fate in a meeting on the brink of the grave, and whatever touch of feverish gladness there might have been for the dying in that brief hour, its after consequences would have been full of evil for the

mourning wife. Better, infinitely better, that she should never know the romance of her husband's youth, never be able to identify the woman he loved, or to inflict upon her own tender heart the self-torture of comparison with such a woman as Mrs. Wornock.

For Lady Emily, in her happy ignorance of all details, that early love was but a vague memory of a remote past, a memory too shadowy to be the cause of retrospective jealousy. She knew that her husband had loved and sorrowed; and she knew no more. It must needs be painful to her to identify his lost love in the person of a lady whom her son valued as a friend, and to whom her son's future wife was warmly attached. Allan had felt therefore that he was fully justified in leaving Mrs. Wornock's story unrevealed, even though by that silence he deprived the man who had loved her of the last tearful farewell, the final touch of hands that had long been parted.

He was full of sadness to-night as he turned the key in the lock, and lifted the heavy lid of the bureau at which he had so often seen his father seated arranging letters and papers with neat, leisurely hands, and that pensive placidity which characterized all the details of his life. That bureau was the one repository for all papers of a private nature, the one spot peculiarly associated with him whom they had laid in the grave at evensong. No one else had ever written on that desk, or possessed the keys of those quaintly inlaid drawers.

And now the secrets of the dead were at the mercy of the survivors, so far as he had left any trace of them among those neatly docketted papers, those packets of letters folded and tied with red tape, or packed in large envelopes, sealed, and labelled.

Allan touched those packets with reverent hands, glanced at their endorsement, and replaced them in the drawers or pigeon-holes as he had found them. He was looking for the manuscript of which his father had told him; the story of "a love which never found its earthly close."

Yes, it was here, under his hand; a thin octavo, bound in limp morocco, a manuscript of something less than a hundred pages, in the hand he knew so well, the small, neat hand that, to Allan's fancy, told of the leisurely life, the mind free from fever and fret, the heart that beat in slow time, and had long outlived the quick alternations of passionate feeling. Allan drew his chair nearer the lamp, and began to read.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE DEAD MAN TOUCH'D ME FROM THE PAST.

"I WONDER how many lives there are like mine in this prosperous England of ours, eminently respectable, comfortable, and altogether protected from the worst hazards of fate, happy even according to the standard measure of happiness among the squirearchy of England—and yet cold and colourless. I wonder how many men there are in every generation who drift along the slow current of a sluggish river, and who call that placid, monotonous movement living. Up the river with the rising tide; down the river with the ebbing tide; up and down, to and fro, between level banks that are always the same, with never a hill and never a crag to break the monotony of the outlook.

"We have a river within a stone's throw of my gates which always seems to me the outward and visible sign of my inward and spiritual life, a river that flows past farms and villages, and for any variety of curve or accident of beauty might just as well be a canal—a useful river bearing the laden barges down to the sea, a river on which a pleasure-boat is as rare as a kingfisher on its banks. And so much might be said of my life; a useful life within the everyday limits of English morality; but a life that nobody will remember or regret, outside my own household, when I am gone.

"This is no complaint that I am writing, to be read when I am in my grave by the son I hope to leave behind me. Far be such a thought from me the writer, and from him the reader. It is only a statement, a history of a youthful experience which has influenced my mature years, chiefly because on that boyish romance I spent all the stock of passionate feeling with which nature had endowed me. It was not much, perhaps, in the beginning. I was no Byronic hero. I was only an impulsive and somewhat sentimental youth, ready to fall in love with the first interesting girl I met, but not to find my Egeria among the audience of a music-hall, or in a dancing garden.

"Do not mistake me, Allan. I have loved your mother truly and even warmly, but never romantically. All that constitutes the poetry, the romance of love, the fond enthusiasm of the lover, vanished out of my life before I was three and twenty. All that came afterwards was plain prose.

"It was in the second year of my university life, and towards the end of the long vacation that I allowed myself to be persuaded to attend a *séance* to be given by some so-called spiritualists in the neighbourhood of Russell Square. Mr. Home, the spiritualist, had been frightening and astonishing people by certain unexplainable manifestations, and he had been lucky enough to number among his patrons and disciples such men as Bulwer Lytton, William and Robert Chambers, and others of almost equal distinction. To the common herd it seemed that there must be some value in manifestations which could interest and even convince these superior intellects; so, with the prestige of Home's performances, and with an article in the *Cornhill Magazine*, to assist them, the people near Russell Square were doing very good business.

"Twice, and sometimes three times a week, they gave a *séance*, and though they did not take money at the doors, or advertise their entertainment in the daily papers, they had their regular subscribers among the faithful, and these subscribers could dispose of tickets of admission among the common herd. As two of the common herd, Gerald Standish and I got our tickets from Mrs. Ravenshaw, a literary lady of Gerald's acquaintance, who had written a spiritualistic novel, and was a profound believer in all the spiritualistic phenomena. Her vivid description of the dark *séance* and its wonders had aroused Gerald's curiosity, and he insisted that I, who was known among the men of my year as a favourite pupil of the then famous mathematical coach, should go with him and bring the severe laws of pure science to bear upon the spirit world.

"I was incurious and indifferent, but Gerald Standish was a genius, and my particular chum. I could not, therefore, be so churlish as to refuse so slight a concession. We dined together at the Horseshoe Restaurant, then in the bloom of novelty; and after a very temperate dinner we walked through the autumn dusk to the quiet street on the eastward side of Russell Square, where the priest and priestess of the spirit-world had set up their temple.

"The approach to the mysteries was sadly commonplace, a shabby hall door, an airless passage that smelt of dinner, and for the temple itself a front parlour sparsely furnished with the most Philistine of furniture. When we entered, the room was empty of humanity. An oil-lamp on a cheffionier by the fireplace dimly lighted the all-pervading shabbiness. The scanty moreen curtains—lodging-house curtains of the poorest type—were drawn. The

furniture consisted of a dozen or so of heavily made mahogany chairs with horse-hair cushions, a large round table on a massive pedestal, supported on three clumsily carved claws, and a bookcase against the wall facing the windows, or I should say rather a piece of furniture which might be supposed to contain books, as the contents were hidden by a brass lattice-work lined with faded green silk. The gloom of the scene was inexpressible, and seemed accentuated by a dismal street cry which rose and fell ever and anon from the distance of Hunter or Coram Street.

"'We are the first,' Gerald whispered, a fact of which I did not require to be informed, and for which he ought to have apologized, seeing that he had deprived me of my after-dinner coffee, and dragged me off yawning, full of alarm lest we should be late.

"Gradually, and in dismal silence, diversified only by occasional whisperings, about a dozen people assembled in the dimness of the dreary room. Among them came Mrs. Ravenshaw and her jovial, business-like husband, who seated themselves next Gerald and me, and confided their experiences of past *séances*. The lady was full of faith and enthusiasm. The gentleman was beginning to have doubts. He had heard things from unbelievers which had somewhat unsettled him. He had invested a good many half-guineas in this dismal form of entertainment, and had wasted a good deal of time in bringing his gifted wife all the way from Shooter's Hill, and, so far, they had got no forwarder than on the first *séance*. They had seen strange things. They had felt the ghastly touch of hands that seemed like dead hands, and which ordinary people would have run a mile to avoid. That heavy mahogany table had shuddered and thrilled under the touch of meeting hands; had lifted itself up, like a rearing horse; had throbbed out messages purporting to come from the dead; strange sounds had been in the air; angelic singing, as of souls in Elysium; and some among the audience had gone away after each *séance* touched and satisfied, believing themselves upon the threshold of other worlds, feeling their commonplace lives shone upon by a light supernal, content henceforward to dwell upon this dull cold earth, since they were now sure of a link between earth and heaven.

"Mrs. Ravenshaw, as became an imaginative writer, was of this idealistic temperament, receptive, confiding; but her husband was a man of business, and wanted to see value for his money. He explained his views to me in a confidential voice while we waited. 'Yes, they had assuredly seen and heard strange things.

They had seen bodies—living human bodies floating in the air—yes, floating in the frowsy atmosphere of this shabby parlour, atmosphere which it was base flattery to call 'air.' They had seen this phenomenon; but, after all, how is the cause of humanity, or the march of enlightenment to be advantaged by the flotation of an exceptional subject here and there? If everybody could float, well and good. The gain would be immense, except for bootmakers and chiropodists, who must suffer for the general weal. But for mediumistic persons, at the rate of one per million of the population, to be carried by viewless powers on the empty air was of the smallest practical use. An improvement in the construction of balloons would be infinitely more valuable.'

"We waited nearly an hour in all—we had arrived half an hour before the stated opening of the *séance*, and we waited five and twenty minutes more, and were yawning and fidgetting hopelessly before the door opened, and a dismal-looking man with a pallid face and long hair, came into the room, followed by a slovenly woman in black, with bare arms, and a towzled, highly artistic flaxen head. He bowed solemnly to the assembled company, looked from the company to the woman, and murmured in a sepulchral voice, 'My wife,' by way of general introduction.

"The flaxen-headed lady seated herself at the large round table, and the dark-haired vampire-like man crept about the room inviting his audience to take their places at the same mystic table. We formed a circle, hand touching hand, the long-haired professor on one side of the table, the flaxen wife on the other. Gerald and I were separated by the width of the table, and the enthusiastic novelist and her practical husband were also as far apart as circumstances would permit.

"My next neighbour on the right was a tall, burly man with a strong North of Ireland accent, a captain in the mercantile marine, Mrs. Ravenshaw informed me. The people who met in this dreary room had come by some knowledge of one another's social status and opinions, although conversation was sternly discouraged as offensive to the impalpable company we were there to cultivate. A gloomy silence, and a vaguely uncomfortable expectancy of something ghastly were the prevailing characteristics of the assembly.

"Mrs. Ravenshaw had informed me that the seaman on my right was an unbeliever, and that he courted the spirits only with the malicious desire of doing them a bad turn. There had been the premonitory symptoms of a row on more than one occasion, and he

had been the sole cause of the adverse feeling which had shown itself at those times.

"My left-hand neighbour was an elderly woman in black, who looked like a spinster, and who, instead of the bonnet of everyday life, wore a rusty Spanish mantilla, and a black velvet band across her high narrow forehead, confining braids of chesnut hair, whose artificial origin was patent to every eye. As the *séance* progressed this lady frequently shed tears. Mrs. Ravenshaw, who was in her confidence, had whispered to me that she came there to hold mystic converse with an officer in the East-India Company's Service, to whom she had been betrothed thirty years before, and who had died in Bengal, after marrying the daughter of a native money-lender and an English governess. It comforted his devoted sweetheart to hear from his own lips, as it were, that he had led a wretched existence with his half-caste wife, and had never ceased to repent his inconstancy to his dearest Amanda. Amanda was the name of the lady in the mantilla, Amanda Jones. It amuses me to recall these details, to dwell upon the opening of a scene which I entered upon so casually, and which was to exercise so lasting an influence upon my life.

"The *séançe* proceeded after the vulgar routine of such mysteries in England and in America. We sat in the frowzy darkness, and heard each other's breathing as we listened to the mysterious rappings, now here, now there, now high, now low, as of some sportive dressmaker rapping her thimbled finger on table, or shutter, or ceiling, or wall. We heard strange messages thumped out, or throbbed out by the excitable mahogany, which became more and more vehement, as if the beating of our hearts, the swift current of blood in all our arteries were being gradually absorbed by that vitalised wood. The German woman translated the rappings into strange scraps of speech, which for some of the audience were full of meaning—private communications from friends long dead, allusions to the past, which were sometimes received in blank wonder, sometimes welcomed as proof irresistible of thought-transference between the dead and the living. The mighty dead, with names familiar to us all, condescended to hold communion with us. Spinosa, Bacon, Shelley, Sir John Franklin, Mesmer—a strange mixture of personalities—but, alas! the feebleness of their communications was a crushing evidence against the theory of a progressive existence beyond the grave.

"'I should like to know how it's done,' said the sea-captain,

suddenly, in an aggressive voice, which irreverence the professor and some of the audience rebuked by an indignant hush.

"The whole business wearied me. I was moved to melancholy rather than to laughter as I realized the depth of human credulity which was indicated by the hushed expectancy of the dozen or so of people sitting round a table in the dark in a shabby Bloomsbury lodging-house, and expecting communications from the world after death—the inexplicable shadow-land of which to think is to enter into the regions of all that is most serious and solemn in human thought—through the interposition of a shabby charlatan who took money for the exhibition of his power.

"I sat in the darkness, weary and disgusted, utterly incurious, desiring nothing but the close of the manifestations and escape into the open air, when suddenly, in a faint wan light, which came I knew not whence, I saw a face on the opposite side of the circle of faces, a face which assuredly had not been among the audience before the lamp was darkened at the beginning of the *séance*. Yet so far as my sense of hearing, which was particularly acute, could inform me, no door had opened, no footstep had crossed the floor since we had seated ourselves at the table, and had formed the circle, hand touching hand.

"It was a face of a wan and mournful beauty, which at once changed my feelings from dullest apathy to keenest interest. The eyes were of a lovely blue, and were remarkable for that translucent brilliancy which is rarely seen after childhood; the features were delicate to attenuation, and, in the faint light, the cheeks looked hollow and colourless, and even the lips were of a sickly pallor. The loveliness of those large etherial eyes counterbalanced all want of life and colour in the rest of the face, which, had those eyes been closed, might have seemed the face of the dead. I looked at it, awe-stricken. Its presence had in one instant transformed the scene of vulgar imposture to a temple and a shrine. I watched and waited spell-bound.

"There were subdued whisperings round the table, and a general excitement and expectancy which indicated the beginning of a more enthralling performance than the vagabond rappings on table and wainscot, or even the furtive and flying touch of smooth cold hands.

"For some minutes, for an interval that seemed much longer than it really was, nothing happened.

"The face looked at us—or, rather, looked beyond us; the pale

lips were parted as in prayer or invocation; the long yellow hair streaming over the shoulders gleamed faintly in the dim, uncertain light, which came and went from some mysterious source. The door opening on the entrance hall was behind my side of the table, and I have little doubt that the curiously soft and searching light, which fluttered every now and then across the circle and lingered on the face opposite, was manipulated by some one outside the door.

"Presently there came a shower of raps—here, there, everywhere, on ceiling, wainscot, doors, above our heads, under our feet—while a strain of organ music, so softly played as to seem remote, crept into the room, and increased the confusion of our senses, distracted past endurance by those meaningless rappings.

"Suddenly a young woman at the end of the table gave a hysterical cry.

"'She is rising, she is rising!' she said. 'Oh, to think of it, to think of it! To think how He rose—He whom they had slain—and vanished from the loving eyes of His disciples! She is like the angels who gather round His throne. Who can doubt now?'

"'It's humbug, and we all know it's humbug,' grumbled the sea-dog on my right. 'But it's clever humbug; and it isn't easy to catch them napping.'

"'Hush!' said the professor's wife indignantly. 'Watch her and be silent.'

"We watched. I had not once taken my eyes from that pale, spiritual face, with the eyes that had a look of seeing things in an immeasurable distance—the things that are not of this earth. Suddenly the dreamy tranquillity of the countenance changed to violent emotion. A vivid smile brightened the pale lips and sparkled in the luminous eyes, and for the first time since I had looked upon them, those exquisite lips spoke.

"'It is coming, it is coming!' she cried. 'Take me, take me, take me!" And then from speech to song seemed a natural transition, as she sang in a silver-sweet soprano—

> "'Angels ever bright and fair,
> Take, oh take me to your care.'

"As that lovely melody floated with clear vibrations through the room, the slender, girlish form was wafted slowly upward with steady, gradual motion, until it hovered halfway between the ceiling and the floor, the long white robe flowing far below the feet, the golden hair falling below the waist. Nothing more like

the conventional idea of an angelic presence could have offered itself to the excited imagination. The figure remained suspended, the arms lifted, and the semi-transparent hands scattering flowers, while we gazed, enthralled by the beauty and gracefulness of that strange vision, and for the moment the hardest of us, even the sea-dog at my side, was a believer.

"Nothing so beautiful could be false, dishonest, ignoble. No; whatever the rest of the *séance* might be, this at least was no vulgar cheat. We were in the presence of a mysterious being, exceptionally gifted—human, perhaps; but not as the common herd are human.

"I was weak enough to think thus. I had abandoned myself wholly to the glamour of the scene, when the sea-dog started to his feet, as the girl gave a shrill cry of fear. She hung for a moment or two over the table, head downward, and fell in a heap between two of the seated spectators, her head striking against the edge of the table, her long hair streaming wide, and faint moanings as of acute pain issuing from her pallid lips.

"In an instant the scene was all noise and confusion. The sea-captain struck a match, Mr. Ravenshaw produced an end of wax candle, and everybody crowded round the girl, talking and exclaiming unrestrainedly.

"'There, now; didn't I tell you so? All a cheat from beginning to end.'

"'He ought to be prosecuted.'

"'Nobody but fools would have ever believed in such stuff.'

"'Look here,' cried the sea-captain, 'she was held up by a straight iron rod, that passes through the floor, and a cross-bar, like a pantomime fairy. She was strapped to the cross-bar, and the strap broke and let her go. She's the artfullest hussy I ever had anything to do with; for I'll be hanged if she hadn't almost taken me in with that face and voice of hers. 'Waft me, angels,' and looking just like an angel, and all the time this swindler was strapping her on to the iron bar.'

"The swindler defended himself angrily, in German English, getting more German as he grew more desperate. They were all clamouring round him. The flaxen-headed Frau had slipped away in the beginning of the skirmish. The golden-haired girl had fainted—a genuine faint, apparently, whatever else might be false—and her head was lying on Mrs. Ravenshaw's shoulder; that lady's womanly compassion for helpless girlhood being stronger even than her indignation at having been hoaxed.

"'Give us back our money!' cried three or four voices out of the dimness. 'Give us back our money for the whole series of *séances!*'

"'Half-guinea tickets! Dear enough if the thing had been genuine!'

"'An impudent swindle!'

"'Will somebody run for the police?' said the sea-captain. 'I'll stay and take care they don't give us the slip. Who'll go?'

"There were half a dozen volunteers, who began to grope their way to the door.

"'One's enough,' said the sea-captain. 'Take care that fellow doesn't make a bolt of it.'

"The warning came too late. As he spoke, some spirit-lips blew out the candle which Mr. Ravenshaw was patiently holding above the group of fainting girl and kindly woman, like one of the living candlesticks in the 'Legend of Montrose,' and the room was dark. There was a sound of scuffling, a rush, the door opened and shut again, and a key turned in the lock with decisive emphasis.

"'Done!' cried the sea-captain, making his way to the curtained window.

"It was curtained and shuttered, and the opening of the shutters occupied some minutes, even for the seaman's practised hands. There were bolts—old-fashioned bolts—with mechanism designed to defy burglary, in the days when wealth and fashion inhabited Bloomsbury. Wax matches sputtered and emitted faint gleams and flashes of light here and there in the room. Two or three people had found their way to the locked door, and were shaking and kicking it savagely, without effect.

"At last the bolts gave way, the deft hands having found the trick of them. The seaman flung open the shutters, and the light of the street-lamp streamed into the room.

"The girl was still unconscious, lying across two chairs, her head on the novelist's shoulder.

"'Shamming, no doubt,' said the seaman.

"'No, no; there is no acting here,' said the lady. 'Her face and hands are deadly cold. Ah, she is beginning to recover. How she shudders, poor child!'

"A long-drawn, shivering sob broke from the white lips, which I could see faintly in the uncertain light from the street-lamp. The seaman was talking to some one outside, asking him to send

the first policeman he met, or to go to the nearest police-office and send some one from there.

"'What's the matter?' asked the voice outside. 'Anybody hurt?'

"'No; but I want to give some one in charge.'

"'All right,' said the voice; and then we heard footsteps hurrying off.

"'Whom are you going to give in charge?' asked Mr. Ravenshaw, in his calm, practical way. 'Not this shivering girl, surely. The other birds are flown.'

"'She may shiver,' retorted the seaman angrily. 'I shall be glad to see her shiver before the beak, to-morrow. He'll talk to her. Shivering won't get over him. Of course she's fainted. A woman can always faint when she finds herself in a difficulty. We'll have her up for obtaining money upon false pretences, all the same.'

"The united efforts of three or four of the party had burst open the door, and everybody except the little group about the girl—myself among them—made for the street door, which was unfastened.

"A couple of policemen arrived a few minutes afterwards, and thereupon began a severe inspection of the house from cellar to garret. They found an old woman in the kitchen, who explained that the dining and drawing-room floors were let to the table-turning gentleman and his wife, and the young lady who lived with them. They had occupied the rooms nearly three months, had paid some rent, but were considerably in arrear. The landlord, who occupied the second floor, had gone into the country to see a sick daughter. Two young men lodged in the attics—printers' readers—but they were seldom in before eleven.

"In a word, the old woman, who was general drudge and caretaker, was alone in the basement with a plethoric spaniel, too old and obese to bark, and a tabby cat. All the rest of the house was empty of human life.

"The policemen and the late believers in Herr Kaltardern's occult powers explored every corner of the rooms which the Germans and their accomplice had inhabited. The personal belongings of the three were of the slightest, the Kaltarderns' sole possession being a large carpet bag of ancient and almost forgotten fashion, and a brush and comb. The room occupied by the girl was clean and tidy, and contained a respectable-looking wooden trunk.

"All this I heard afterwards from Gerald, who took an active part in the investigation. For myself, while the inquisitive explorers were tramping in and out of the rooms above and below, I remained beside the two good people who were caring for the helpless sharer in the foolish show—accomplice or victim, as the case might be.

"I had found and relighted the lamp, and by its light Mrs. Ravenshaw and I examined the girl's forehead, which had been severely cut in her fall. While we were gently drying the blood which stained her eyelids and cheeks, she opened her eyes and looked at us with a bewildered expression.

"'Oh, how my head aches!" she moaned. 'What was it hurt me like that?'

"'You were hurt in your fall,' I answered. 'Your head struck the edge of the table.'

"'But how could I fall? How could they let me fall?'

"'The strap round your waist broke, and you fell from the iron bar.'

"She looked at me in amazement—simulated, as I thought—and it distressed me to think that fair young face should be capable of such a lying look.

"'What strap? The spirits were holding me up—wafting me towards the sky.'

"'Very likely,' I answered, picking up the broken strap and showing it to her; 'but the spirits couldn't manage it without a little mechanical aid. And the mechanical aid was not as sound as it ought to have been.'

"The girl took the strap in her hands, and looked at it and felt it with an expression of countenance so full of hopeless bewilderment that I began to doubt my previous conviction, to doubt even the evidence of my senses. Could any youthful face be so trained to depict unreal emotion? Could so childlike a creature be such a consummate actress?

"'Was this round my waist?' she asked, looking from me to the kindhearted woman whose arms were still supporting her slender, undeveloped figure.

"'Yes, this was round your waist, and by this you were strapped to this iron bar here. You see, the rod passes through the floor. The cross-bar must have been fastened to it while you were singing. My poor child, pray do not try to sustain a falsehood. You are so young that you are hardly responsible for what you have done.

You were in these people's power, and they could make you do what they liked. Pray be candid with us. We want to befriend you if we can, do we not, Mrs. Ravenshaw?'

"'Yes, indeed we do, poor thing!' answered the lady heartily. 'Only be truthful with us.'

"'Indeed, I am telling the truth,' the girl protested tearfully. 'I did not know of that strap, or of the iron rod. They told me I was gifted—that I was in communion with my dear dead father, when I felt my soul uplifted—as I have felt it often and often, sitting singing to myself, alone in my room. I have felt as if my spirit were soaring away and away, upward to that world beyond the skies where my father and my mother are. I have felt as if, while my body remained below, my spirit were floating upward and upward, away from earth and sorrow. I told the Frau how I used to feel, because I believed in her. She brought me into communion with my father. He used to rap out messages of love, and she taught me how to understand the spirit language. That was how I came to know her. That was how I was willing to go with them and join in their *séances*.'

"'I begin to understand,' said I. 'They told you that you were gifted, and that you had a power of floating upward from the floor to the ceiling?'

"'Yes. It came upon me unawares. They asked me to sing, and to let my spirit float towards heaven as I sang. I always used to feel like that of an evening in our church. I used to feel my soul lifted upward when I sang the *Magnificat*. And one night at a *séance*, soon after we came to London, I was singing, and I felt myself floating upward. It seemed as if some powerful hands were holding me up; and I felt round me in the half-darkness, and there was no one near. I was moving alone, without any visible help; and I felt that it was the passionate longing of my spirit to approach the spirit of my dead father which was lifting me up. And, oh, was it only that horrid strap and that iron rod?' she exclaimed, bursting into tears. 'How cruel—how cruel to cheat me like that!'

"She had evidently no thought of the public who were cheated, or of her own position as a detected impostor, or the tool and accomplice of impostors. Her tears were for the hallucination so roughly dispelled.

"The tramping in and out of rooms was over by this time. The majority of the audience were leaving the house, the sea-dog loud in his disgust and indignation till the last moment.

"'I should have liked to give that young hussey in charge,' he said in a loud voice as he passed the half-open door, evidently arguing with some milder-tempered victim; 'but, as you say, she's little more than a child, and no magistrate would punish her.'

"I breathed more freely when I heard the street door bang behind this gentleman and the policemen.

"'They're all gone except ourselves,' said Gerald. 'The gifted German and his wife have shown us a clean pair of heels, and there's only an old charwoman in the basement. She tells me your young friend there came from the country—somewhere in Sussex—and always behaved herself very nicely. The old woman seems fond of her.'

"'Yes, she was always kind to me,' said the girl.

"'Was she? Well, I hope she'll be kind to you now you're left high and dry,' said Gerald. 'These people won't come back any more, I take it. They travel in light marching order—a grubby old carpet bag, and a brush and comb which would account for the lady's tangled head. They won't come back to fetch *those*, at the risk of being had up for obtaining money upon false pretences. And what's to become of you, I wonder?'—to the girl. 'Have you any money?'

"'No, sir.'

"'Any friends in London?'

"'No.'

"'Any friends in the country—in the place you left?'

"'Not now. No one would be kind to me now. There was a kind lady who wanted to apprentice me to her dressmaker when my father died, and I was left quite alone; but I hated the idea of dressmaking; and one night there was a spiritualistic *séance* at the school-house, and I went, because I had heard of messages from the dead, and I thought if it were possible for the dead to speak to the living, my father would not leave me without one word of consolation. We loved each other so dearly; we were all the world to each other; and people said the dead had spoken—had sent messages of love and comfort. So I went to the dark *séance*, and I asked them to call my father's spirit; and there was a message rapped out, and I believed that it was from him; and next day I met Madame Kaltardern in the street, and I asked her if the messages were really true; and she said they were true, and she spoke very kindly to me, and asked me if I would like to be a medium, and said she was sure I was gifted—I could be a clair-

voyant if I liked — and it was a glorious life to be in constant communion with great spirits.'

"'And you thought you would like it better than dressmaking?' said Mrs. Ravenshaw, sympathetically.

"'It was of my father I thought. He had been dead such a short time. Sometimes I could hardly believe that he was dead. When I sat alone in the firelight, I used to fancy he was in the room with me; I used to speak to him, and beg him to answer me.'

"'And were there any raps then?' asked the practical Ravenshaw.

"'No, never when I was alone. The Kaltarderns came back after Christmas, and there was another *séance*, for the benefit of the Infirmary, and I went again; and madame told me my father was speaking to me. He rapped out a strange message about the organ. I was to bid good-bye to the organ of which I was so fond; for I had a gift that was greater than music; and I was to go with those who could cultivate that gift. So the next day, when Madame Kaltardern asked me to go away with them, and promised to develop my mediumistic power, I consented to go. I was to be like their adopted daughter. They were to clothe me and feed me, but they were to give me no money. A gift like mine could not be paid for with money. If I tried to make money by my power, I should lose it. I did not want money from them. I wanted to be brought into communion with the spirit world, with my father whom I loved so dearly, and with my mother, who died when I was eight years old, and with my little sister Lucy, who died soon after mother—the little sister I used to nurse. My only world was the world of the dead. And, oh, was it all trickery—all? Those messages from father and mother—those baby kisses, so soft, so quick, so light; the hand upon my forehead—the hand of the dead—touching me and blessing me! Was it all false, all trickery?'

"She rocked herself to and fro sobbing, unconsolable at the thought of her vanished dream-world.

"'I'm afraid so, my dear,' said Ravenshaw, kindly. 'I'm afraid it was all humbug. You have been duped yourself, while you have helped to dupe others. And now what is to be done with her, that is the question?' he asked, appealing to his wife and me.

"'Yes, that's the question with a vengeance,' said Gerald. 'We can't leave her in this house, in the care of a deaf old woman, to bear the brunt of the landlord's anger when he comes home and finds the birds flown and his arrears of rent the baddest of bad

debts. Poor child! we must get her away somehow. Have you no friends in the country who would give you a home?' he asked the girl.

"'No,' she answered, fighting with her sobs. 'People were very kind to me just at first after my father's death; and then I think they got tired of me. They said I was helpless; I ought to have been able to put my hand to something useful. The only thing I cared for was music. I used to sing in the choir; but it was only a village church, and the choir were only paid a pound a quarter. I couldn't live upon that; and I couldn't play the organ well enough to take my father's place. And then Miss Grimshawe, a rich old lady, offered to apprentice me to a dressmaker; but I hated the idea of that. Dressmakers' girls are so common; and my father was a gentleman, though he was poor. When I told Miss Grimshawe I was going away with the Kaltarderns, she was very angry. She said I should end badly. Everybody was angry. I can never go back to them; they would all turn from me.'

"Mr. Ravenshaw looked suspicious; Mrs. Ravenshaw looked serious; and even I asked myself whether the girl's story, so plausible, so convincing to my awakened interest, might not, after all, be a tissue of romance, which sounded natural, because it had been recited so often.

"Gerald was the most business-like among us.

"'What is your name?' he asked.

"'Esperanza Campbell.'

"'Esperanza? Why, that's a Spanish name!'

"'My mother was a Spaniard.'

"'So! And what is the name of the village where your father played the organ.'

"'Besbery, near Petworth.'

"'Besbery!' repeated Gerald, pencilling memoranda on his linen cuff. 'Do you remember the name of the vicar, or rector?'

"'There was only a curate-in-charge—Mr. Harrison.'

"'Very good,' said Gerald. 'Now, what we have to do is to get this poor young lady into some decent lodging, where the landlady will take care of her till we can help her to find some employment, or respectable situation, not mediumistic. I suppose it would hardly be convenient to you to take her home with you, and keep her for a week or so, Mrs. Ravenshaw?' Gerald inquired, as an afterthought.

"Mrs. Ravenshaw hastened to explain that, with children, nursery-

governess, and spinster aunt, every bed in her house at Shooter's Hill was occupied.

"'We have not known what it is to have a spare bedroom for the last three years,' she said.

"'Babies have accumulated rather rapidly,' said Ravenshaw. Poor creature, how my careless, independent bachelorhood pitied him. 'And every second baby means another servant. If one could only bring them up in a frame, like geranium cuttings!'

"'I think I know of a lodging-house where Miss Campbell could find a temporary home, not far from here,' I said.

"'Think you know?' cried Gerald, impatiently. 'You can't think about knowing; you know or don't know. Where is it?'

"'In Great Ormond Street.'

"'Capital—close by. I'll go and get a cab. Miss Campbell, just put your traps together, and—and do up your hair, and get on a gown,' looking at her flowing robe and flowing hair with evident distaste, 'while I'm gone.'

"He was out of the room in a moment.

"'Are you sure the house is perfectly respectable, Mr. Beresford?' inquired Mrs. Ravenshaw, who, as a fiction-weaver, no doubt let her imagination run upon the horrors of the great city and the secret iniquities of lodging-house keepers, from Hogarth's time downwards.

"I told her that I could trust my own sister to the house in Great Ormond Street, which was kept by my old nurse and my father's old butler, who had retired from service about five years before, and had invested their savings in the furnishing of a roomy and old-fashioned house for the accommodation of all that is most respectable in the way of families and single gentlemen.

"'I can vouch for my old nurse Martha as one of the best and kindest of women, as well as one of the shrewdest,' I said.

"The girl heard this discussion unmoved and uninterested by the trouble we were taking on her behalf. Her sobs had subsided, but she was crying silently, weeping over the cruel end of a dream which had been more to her than all the waking world. She told me afterwards how much and how real that dream had been to her.

"Mrs. Ravenshaw went to her room with her, and helped her to exchange the long white alb-like garment for a tidy black gown, on which the crape trimming had grown rusty with much wear. I can see her now as she came back into the lamplight in that plain black gown, and with her yellow hair rolled into a massive coil at the

back of her head, the graceful figure, so girlish, so willowy in its tall slenderness, the fair pale face, and dark-blue eyes heavy with tears.

"She carried a poor little black-straw hat in her hand, which she put on presently, before we went downstairs to the cab. Gerald and I carried her box. There was no one to object to its removal. The old woman in the basement made no sign. One of the printers let himself in with a latch-key while we were in the hall, looked at us curiously, and went upstairs without a word.

"Mrs. Ravenshaw kissed Esperanza, and wished her a friendly good night, promising to do what she could to help her in the future; and then she and her husband hurried away to catch the last train to Shooter's Hill.

CHAPTER XIX.

"WHAT WAS A SPECK EXPANDS INTO A STAR."

"HAD the landlady of the house in Great Ormond Street been anybody in the world except my old nurse, I doubt if any philanthropic purpose would have inspired me with the boldness to carry through the work I had undertaken. To appear before the average lodging-house keeper within half an hour of midnight, and with such a *protégée* as Esperanza Campbell upon my hands, would have required the courage of a lion, and at that time I was a particularly shy and sensitive young man, brought up in the retirement of a remote country house and in the society of a mother whom I loved very dearly, but, as we are told to love God, with fear and trembling. My constitutional shyness, the natural outcome of narrow surroundings, had kept me from making friends at the University, and I believe it was sheer pity which had prompted Gerald Standish to take me under his wing. His kindness was rewarded by finding me a likeable companion, whose character supplied some of the qualities which were wanting in his bright and buoyant disposition. We were real friends; and remained friends until the end of his too-brief life.

"So much to explain that it was only my confidence in my old nurse's indulgence which enabled me to cut the knot of our difficulty in disposing of Esperanza Campbell.

"My faithful Martha and her excellent husband were sleeping the

sleep of the just in a ground-floor room at the back of the house, while their maidservant slumbered still more soundly in a back attic. Happily Martha was a light sleeper, had trained herself to wake at the lightest cry in seasons of measles or whooping-cough, teething or infantile bronchitis; so my second application to the bell and knocker brought a prompt response. Bolts were drawn, a key was turned, a chain was unfastened, the door was opened a couple of inches, and a timid voice asked what was wanted.

"'It is I, Martha, Georgie Beresford. I've brought you a lodger.'

"'Oh, come now, Mr. George, that's one of your jokes. You've been to the theatre, and you're playing a trick upon me. Go home now, do, like a dear young gentleman, and come and have a cup of tea with me some afternoon when you've got half an hour to spare.'

"'Martha, you are keeping a very sweet young lady out in the cold. For goodness' sake open the door, and let me explain matters.'

"'Can't she take her in?' asked Gerald, impatiently, from the cab.

"Martha opened the door, and exhibited herself reluctantly in her casual costume of flannel dressing-gown and tartan shawl.

"'What *do* you mean, Mr. George? What can you mean by wanting lodgings for a young lady at this time of night?'

"'Sounds queer, don't it?' said Gerald, who had bounded up the steps and burst into the dim wainscoted hall, lighted only by the candle Martha was carrying. 'The fact is, we're in a difficulty, and Mr. Beresford assures me you can get us out of it.'

"And then in fewest words and with most persuasive manner he explained what we wanted, a home and a protector for a blameless young girl whom the force of circumstances had flung upon our hands at half-past eleven o'clock in the evening. Somehow we must get rid of her. She was a gentleman's daughter, and we could not take her to the workhouse. Reputation, hers and ours, forbade that we should take her to an hotel.

"Not a word did Gerald say about table-turning or spirit-rapping. He was shrewd enough to guess that any hint at the *séance* would have prejudiced honest Martha against our charge.

"'I'm sure I don't know what to do,' said Martha; and I could see that she was suspicious of Gerald's airy manner, and doubtful even of me. 'My husband's fast asleep. He isn't such a light sleeper as I am. I don't know what he would say——'

"'Never mind what he would say,' interrupted Gerald. 'What you have to say is that you'll take Miss Campbell in and give her a tidy room somewhere—she ain't particular, poor thing—and make her comfortable for a week or two while she looks out for a situation.'

"'Oh, she's on the look-out for a situation, is she?' said Martha, evidently mollified by the idea of a bread-winning young person. 'You see, Mr. George,' she went on, appealing to me, 'in London one can't be too particular. This house is all Benjamin and I have to look to in our old age; we've put our little all into it; and if the young lady happened to be rather dressy; or sang comic songs; or went to the theatre in cabs; or had gentlemen leave letters for her; why, it would just be our ruin. Our first floor is let to one of the most particular of widow ladies. I don't believe there's a more particular lady in London.'

"'My dear Martha, do you think I'm a fool or a knave? This girl is a village organist's daughter——'

"'Ah, Mr. George, they must all begin,' said Martha, shaking her head philosophically.

"'She is in mourning for her father—an orphan—friendless and unhappy——'

"'As for conduct, propriety, and all that kind of thing, I'll answer for her as if she were my own sister,' put in Gerald, in his splendidly reckless way; 'and that being the case, I hope you are not going to keep the poor young lady sitting out there in a cold cab till to-morrow morning.'

"Martha listened to Gerald and looked at me.

"'If you're sure it's all right, Mr. George,' she murmured, 'I'd do anything in the world to oblige you; but this house is our all——'

"'Yes, yes,' Gerald exclaimed impatiently. 'You told us that before. Bring her in, George. It's all settled.'

"This was a happy stroke, for old Martha would have stood in the hall with her guttering candle and in her deshabille of flannel and tartan debating the matter for another quarter of an hour; but when I brought the pale girl in her black frock up the steps, and handed her into the old woman's care, the motherly heart melted all at once, and all hesitancy was at an end.

"'Poor young thing; why, she's little more than a child! How pale and cold you look, poor dear. I'll go down and light a bit of fire and warm a cup of broth for you. My second floor left

the day before yesterday. I'll soon get the bedroom ready for you.'

"'That's as it should be,' said I. 'You'll find yourself safe and comfortable here, Miss Campbell, with the kindest woman I know. I'll call in a few days, and see how you are getting on.'

"I slipped a couple of sovereigns into my old nurse's palm as I wished her good night. The cabman brought in the poor little wooden trunk, received a liberal fare, and went his way in peace, while Gerald and I walked to the Tavistock, glad to cool down after the evening's excitement.

"'What an adventure!' said he. 'Of course I always knew it was humbug, but I never thought it was quite such transparent humbug.'

"'That girl would have taken any one in,' said I.

"'Why, because she's young and pretty, after a rather sickly fashion?'

"'No, because she was so thoroughly in earnest, and believed in the thing herself.'

"'You really think she was a dupe and not an accomplice?'

"'I am sure of it. Her distress was very real. And at her age, and with her imaginative nature——'

"'What do you know of her nature?'" he asked sharply.

"The question and his manner of asking it pulled me up suddenly, as a dreamer of morning dreams is awakened by the matter-of-fact voice of the servant who comes to call him.

"What did I know of her? What assurance had I that her sobs and lamentation, her pathetic story of the father so loved and mourned were not as spurious as the rest of the show, as much a cheat as the iron rod and the leather strap? How did I know? Well, I could hardly have explained the basis of my conviction, but I did know; and I would have staked my life upon her honesty and her innocence.

"I woke next morning to a new sense of responsibility. I had taken this helpless girl's fate into my hands, and to me she must look for aid in chalking out a path for herself. I had to find her the means of earning her daily bread, reputably, and not as a drudge. The problem was difficult of solution. I had heard enough of the lot of the average half-educated governess—the life harder, the pay less, than a servant's. Yet what else than a nursery governess could this girl be, at her age, and with her attainments, which I concluded were not above the ordinary schoolgirl's. The look-out

was gloomy, and I was glad to shut my eyes to the difficulties of the situation, telling myself that my good Martha would give the poor child a comfortable home upon very moderate terms—such terms as I could afford to pay out of my very moderate allowance, and that in a month or two something—in the language of the immortal Micawber—would turn up.

"There was but another week of the Long, a week which under ordinary circumstances I should have spent with my widowed mother at her house in the country, but which I decided to spend in London, accepting Gerald's invitation to share his rooms in Arundel Street, and do a final round of the theatres; an invitation I had previously declined. During that week I was often in Great Ormond Street, and contrived to learn a great deal more about Esperanza's character and history—of her history all she had to tell; of her character, which to me seemed transparent as a forest streamlet, all I could divine. I called in Ormond Street on the second day of her residence there, and found good Nurse Martha in the best possible humour. It was four o'clock in the afternoon, and she insisted that I should stop for a cup of tea, and as tea-making—that is to say, the art of producing a better cup of tea than anybody else could produce from the same cannister, kettle, and teapot—had always been a special talent of Martha's, I was glad to accept her hospitality.

"Miss Campbell had gone for a little walk round the squares, she informed me.

"'She doesn't care about going out,' explained Martha; 'she'd rather sit over a book or play the harmonium. But I told her she must take an airing for her health's sake.'

"I was disappointed at not finding Esperanza in the tidy back parlour to which Nurse Martha ushered me—a room of exemplary neatness and snugness, enlivened by those living presences which always make for cheerfulness—vulgar as we may deem them—a glass tank of gold fish, a canary bird, and a magnificent tabby cat, sleek, clean, luxuriously idle, in purring contemplation of the bright little fire in the old-fashioned grate, that grate with hobs which reminded me of my nursery deep in the heart of the country.

"'Now you sit down in Blake's armchair, Mr. George, and let's have a talk over missy. I shouldn't have taken those two sovereigns from you the night before last if I hadn't been all of

a muddle with the suddenness of the thing. I don't want to be paid in advance for doing a kindness to a helpless girl.'

"'No, Martha; but since the helpless girl was on my hands, it's only right I should pay you somehow, and we may as well settle that question at once, as it may be several weeks before Miss Campbell is able to find a suitable situation.'

"'Several months, more likely. Do you know how young she is, Mr. George?'

"'Eighteen.'

"'Eighteen last birthday—only just turned eighteen, and she's much younger than most girls of eighteen in all her ways and thoughts. She's clever enough with her hands, poor child. Nothing lazy or lolloping about her—made her own bed and swept and tidied her own room without a word from me; but there's a helplessness somewhere—in her thoughts. I don't know how she'll ever set about getting a situation—I don't know what kind of situation she's fit for. She's much too young and too pretty for a governess.'

"'Not too young for a nursery-governess, surely.'

"'A nursery-governess means a nursery-maid without a cap, Mr. George. I shouldn't like to see her brought to that. I've taken to her already. Benjamin says, with her sweet voice and pretty face, she ought to go on the stage.'

"I was horrified at the idea.

"'Martha, how can you speak of such a thing? Have you any idea what the life of a theatre means for an inexperienced girl—for a beautiful girl, most of all?'

"'Oh, I've heard there are temptations; but a prudent young woman can take care of herself anywhere, Mr. George; and an imprudent young woman will go wrong in a country parsonage, or a nunnery. If Miss Campbell is to earn her own living, she'll have to face dangers and temptations, go where she may. She'll have to take care of herself, poor child. There'll be nobody else to take care of her. I've heard that young women are well looked after in some theatres—at Mr. Charles Kean's, for instance. I knew a young person that used to walk on in *Louis the Eleventh*—dressed as a boy in blue and gold—and she told me that Mr. and Mrs. Charles Kean was *that* particular——"

"'The Keans are making a farewell tour in Australia, and will never go into management again, Martha. You are talking nonsense.'

"Poor Martha looked crestfallen at this reproof.

"'I dare say I am, Mr. George; but, for all that, I don't think Miss Campbell will ever do much as a governess. It isn't in her. There's a helplessness, and a bendingness, and droopingness, if I may say so, about her character that won't do for a governess. The only mistress that would keep her is the kind of mistress that would make a slave of her.'

"'Hard lines,' I said, getting up and walking about the little back parlour.

"It was a third room quite at the back of the substantial Georgian house; there was scant space for my restlessness between the old square piano, which served as a sideboard, and the fireplace by which my dear old Martha sat looking at me with a perturbed countenance.

"I began to think I had let myself in for a bad thing. What was I to do with this girl, whose fate I had in some measure taken into my hands? It had seemed easy enough to bring her to this quiet shelter, which she might leave in a week or so, braced up and ready to fight her battle of life—the battle we all have to fight somehow—a self-supporting young woman. Self-supporting, that was the point. I now remembered with terror that there is a large class of persons upon this earth whom not even the scourge of poverty can make self-supporting; a vast multitude of feeble souls who resign themselves from the beginning of things to drift upon the stream of life, and are never known to strike out and swim for any shore, and so drift down to the ocean of death. Of these are the poor relations for whom something is for ever being done, and who never do anything for themselves; of these the feeble scions of patrician family trees, who are always waiting for sinecures under Government.

"God help her, poor soul; if she was one of these invertebrates; and God help me in my responsibility towards her.

"I was an only son; the heir to a small estate in Suffolk, and an income of something under three thousand a year. I was not quite twenty years of age, and I had to maintain myself at the most expensive college in Cambridge on an allowance that many of the rich young men with whom I associated would have considered abject penury. I was not in a fast set. I did not hunt—indeed, with my modest income, hunting would have been impossible; but I was not without tastes which absorbed money; the love of choice books and fine engravings, the fancy for curios picked up here or there,

the presence of which gave interest to my rooms, and, perhaps, helped to reconcile me to many long hours within closed doors. I had hitherto been most careful to live within my income, for I knew that it was as much as my mother could afford to give me, taking into consideration her devotion to the estate which was to be mine by-and-by, and the maintenance and improvement of which had been to her as a religion. Her model cottages, her home-farm, the village church, to whose every improvement her purse had largely contributed, these were the sources of expenditure which kept her comparatively poor, and which forbade any extravagance on my part.

"All these facts were in my mind that afternoon as I paced the narrow bounds of old Martha's sitting-room.

"'She will have to get her living,' I said severely, as the result of these meditations, which showed me no margin for philanthropy.

"Had my mother been as some men's mothers, I might naturally have contemplated shifting the burden upon her shoulders. I might have told her Esperanza's story, and handed Esperanza over to her care as freely as if I had picked up a stray cat or dog. But my mother was not one of those soft, impressionable women who are always ready to give the reins to sentiment. She was a good woman, and devoted much of her life and means to doing good, but her benevolence was restricted to the limits of her own parish. She would hardly listen to a tale of sorrow outside her own village.

"'We have so much to do for our own people, George,' she used to tell me; 'it is folly to be distracted by outside claims. Here we know our return for every shilling we give. We know the best and the worst about those we help.'

"Were I to tell her Esperanza's story, her suggestions for helping me out of my difficulty would be crueller than old Martha's. She would be for sending the girl into service as a housemaid, or for getting her an assisted passage to the Antipodes on an emigrant ship.

"Martha came to my rescue in my trouble now as she had done many a time when I wore a kilt, and when my naked knees had come into abrupt collision with a gravel path or a stony beach.

"'She'll have to be older and wiser before she gets her own living, Mr. George,' said Martha; 'but don't you trouble about her. As long as I've a bed or a sofa to spare, she can stop with me and Benjamin. Her bite and sup won't hurt us, poor thing, and I don't

want sixpence from you. She shall stop here free gratis, Mr. George, till she finds a better home.'

"I gave my old nurse a hug, as if I had been still the boy in the Macdougal kilt.

"'No, no, Martha; I'm not going to impose on your generosity. I shall be able to pay you *something*. Only I thought you might want two or three pounds a week for her board, and I could not manage that for an indefinite period.'

"'Two or three pounds! Lor, Mr. George, if that's your notion of prices, Cambridge landladies must be 'arpies. Why, I only get two guineas for my drawing-room floor, as a permanency, and lady-tenants even begrudge half a crown extra for kitchen fire. Let her stop here as long as she likes, Mr. George, and never you think about money. It's only her future I'm thinking of, for there's a helplessness about her that—— Ah, there she is,' as the hall door slowly opened. 'I gave her my key. She's quite one of us already.'

"She came quietly into the room, and took my offered hand without shyness or embarrassment. She was pale still, but the fresh air had brought a faint tint of rose into the pallid cheeks. She looked even younger and more child-like to-day in her shabby mourning frock and poor little black straw hat than she had looked the night before last. Her strong emotion then had given more of womanliness to the small oval face. To-day there was a simplicity in her aspect, as of a trusting child who took no thought of the future, secure in the kindness of those about her.

"I thought of a sentence in the gospel. 'Consider the lilies how they grow.' This child had grown up like a lily in the mild atmosphere of domestic love, and had been the easy dupe of a delusion which appealed to her affection for the dead.

"'I called to see if you were quite comfortable and at home with Mrs. Blake,' I said, far more embarrassed by the situation than Esperanza was.

"'Yes, indeed I am,' she answered in her sad sweet voice. 'It is so nice to be with some one so kind and clean and comfortable. The Frau was not *very* unkind; but she was so dirty. She gave us such horrid things to eat—the smell of them made me ill—and then she said I was affected and silly, and the Herr used to say I might starve if I could not eat their food. It made me think of my happy home with father, and our cosy little tea-table beside the fire. We did not always have dinner,' she added naïvely; 'neither of us cared much for that.'

"She hung over old Martha's shoulder with affectionate familiarity, and the horny old hand which had led my infant steps was held up to clasp hers, and the withered old face smiled.

"'See how she gets round us,' said Martha, nodding at me. 'Benjamin is just as bad. And you should hear her play the 'armonian of an evening, and sing 'Abide with me.' You'd hardly hear her without shedding tears.'

"'Do you think you can be happy here for a few weeks?' I asked.

"'Yes, as happy as I can be anywhere without father. I dreamt of him last night—such a vivid dream. I know he was near me. It was something more than a dream. I heard his voice close beside my pillow calling my name. I know his spirit was in the room. It isn't because the Herr and his wife were cheats that there is no link between the living and the dead. I know there is a link,' she insisted passionately, her eyes brimming with sudden tears. 'They are not dead—those we dearly love—only removed from us. The clay is gone; the soul is hovering near, blessing, comforting us.'

"She sobbed out her grief, hiding her face upon Martha's substantial shoulder. I could speak no word of consolation; nor would I for worlds have argued against this fond hallucination, the dream of sorrowing love.

> "'I shall not see thee. Dare I say
> No spirit ever brake the band
> That stays him from the native land,
> In which he walk'd when clasp't in clay?
>
> No visual shade of some one lost,
> But he, the Spirit himself, may come
> Where all the nerve of sense is numb;
> Spirit to Spirit, Ghost to Ghost.'

"I quoted those lovely lines in a low voice as I walked softly up and down the darkening room; and then there was silence save for soothing wordless murmurs from Martha, such murmurs as had served to hush my own baby sorrows.

"'There's the kettle just on the boil,' cried the good soul, cheerily, when Esperanza's sobs had ceased; 'and I know Mr. George must be wanting his cup of tea.'

"She rose and bustled about in her dear old active way. She lit a lamp—an inartistic cheap paraffin-lamp, but the light was cheerful. The tea-table arranged by Martha was the picture of neatness. She set Esperanza the feminine task of making toast.

The poor child had the prettiest air of penitence as she kissed Martha's hand, and then knelt meekly down, with the fireglow crimsoning the alabaster face and neck, and shining on the pale gold hair and rusty black frock.

"'I'm afraid I'm very troublesome,' she said apologetically; 'but, indeed, I'm very grateful to you, sir, for taking care of me that dreadful night, and to dear Mrs. Blake for all her kindness to me.'

"'Mrs. Blake is the quintessence of kindness. I am very glad to think you can live happily here until she or I can find some nice situation for you.'

"She had been smiling softly over her task, but her face clouded in an instant.

"'A situation. That's what everybody said at Besbery! We must find her a situation. And then Miss Grimshaw wanted me to be a dressmaker.'

"'You shall not be a dressmaker. I promise that.'

"'But oh, what am I to be? I don't know half enough for a governess. I couldn't teach big girls German and French and drawing. I couldn't teach little boys Latin. And that's what everybody wants of a governess. I've read the advertisements in the newspapers.'

"'And as to being a nursery-governess, why, it's negro slavery!' said Martha.

"'I wouldn't mind the drudgery, only I hate children!' said Esperanza.

"This avowal shocked me. I looked at the soft, childlike countenance, and the speech seemed incongruous.

"'I have never had anything to do with children since my sister Lucy died,' she explained. 'I shouldn't understand them, and they would laugh at me and my fancies. After Lucy's death, I lived alone with father, always alone, he and I. The harmonium and the organ in the church close by were our only friends. Our clergyman was just civil to father, but I don't think he ever liked him. I heard him once tell some one that his organist was an eccentricity. An eccentricity! That was all he could say about my father, who was ever so much cleverer than he.'

"She said this with pride, almost with defiance, looking me in the face as if she were challenging me to dispute the fact.

"'Was your father very clever?' I asked her, keenly interested in any glimpses of her history.

"'Yes, I am sure he was clever, much cleverer than the common

run of people. He loved music, and he played beautifully. His touch upon the old organ made the church music sound angelic. Now and then there was some one in the church—some stranger—who seemed to understand his playing, and who was astonished to find such an organist in a village church—an out-of-the-way village like ours. But for the most part people took no notice. It didn't seem to matter to them whether the choir sang well or badly; but when they sang false it hurt father just like bodily pain.'

"'Did he teach you to play?'

"'A little. But he wasn't fond of teaching. What I know of music I found out chiefly for myself—just sitting alone at the organ, when I could get one of the choir boys to blow for me, touching the keys, and trying the stops, till I learnt something about them. But I play very badly.'

"'Beautifully! beautifully!' ejaculated Martha. 'You draw tears.'

"'You sang in the choir, I think?' I said.

"'Yes; there were four young ladies, and a lady's-maid with a contralto voice, and I was the sixth. There were about a dozen men and boys, who sat on the other side of the chancel. People said it was a good choir for a village church. Father was so unhappy when we sang badly that we could not help trying hard to sing well.'

"I remembered those seraphic soprano notes in Handel's thrilling melody, and I could understand that at least one voice in the choir had the heavenly ring.

"'Well,' I said at last, 'we must hope for the best. Something may turn up that will suit you better than governessing. And in the meantime you can make yourself happy with my old nurse. I can answer for it she'll never be unkind to you.

"'I'm sure of that. I would rather stay here and be her servant than go among strangers.'

"'What, wear an apron and cap and wait upon the lodgers?' I said, laughing at the absurdity of the idea. She seemed a creature so far removed from the useful race of neat-handed Phillises.

"'I should not mind.'

"The clock in the hall struck six, and I had promised Gerald to be ready for dinner at half-past, as we were to go to a theatre afterwards—the Adelphi, where Jefferson was acting in *Rip Van Winkle*. I had to take a hurried leave.

"'Don't you worry yourself about *her*, Mr. George,' said Martha,

as she let me out at the street door; 'I'll keep her as long as ever you like.'

"I told Martha that I should send her a little money from time to time, and that I should consider myself in her debt for a pound a week as long as Miss Campbell stayed with her.

"'She'll want a new frock, won't she?' I asked. 'The one she wears looks very shabby.'

"'It looks what it is, Mr. George. It's all but threadbare, and it's the only frock she has in the world, poor child! But don't you trouble about that either. You gave me two sovereigns. One of those will buy the stuff, and she and I can make the frock. I've cut out plenty of frocks in my day. I used to make all your mother's frocks once upon a time.'

"She had nursed my mother in the bloom of her youth; she had nursed me in her sturdy middle life; and now in her old age she was prompt and willing to care for this girl for whose fate I had made myself responsible.

"Gerald received me with his customary cheerincss, though I was ten minutes after the half-hour, and the fried sole had frizzled itself to dryness by that delay.'

"'I've some good news for you!' he exclaimed, in his exuberant way. 'It's all right.'

"'What's all right?'

"'Your *protégée*. I've written to the parson at Besbery. The story she told us was gospel truth.'

"'I never thought it was anything else.'

"'Ah, that's because you're over head and ears in love with her,' said Gerald.

"I felt myself blushing furiously, blushing like a girl whose secret tenderness stands revealed. Of course I protested that nothing was farther from my thoughts than love; that I was only sorry for the girl's loncliness and helplessness. Gerald obviously doubted me; and I had to listen to his sage counsel on the subject. He was my senior by two years, and claimed to be a man of the world, while I had been brought up at my mother's apron-string. He foresaw dangers of which I had no apprehension.

"'There is nothing easier to drop into than an entanglement of that sort,' he said. 'You had much better fall in love with a ballet-girl. It may be more expensive for the moment, but it won't compromise your future.'

"His arguments had no effect upon my conduct in the few

remaining days of the long vacation. I went to Ormond Street a second and a third time during those few days. I took Esperanza to an afternoon concert at the St. James's Hall, and enjoyed her ecstasy as she listened to Sainton and Bottesini. With her music was a passion, and I believe she sat beside me utterly unconscious of my existence, with a soul lifted above earth and all earthly feelings.

"'You were happy while the music lasted,' I said, as we walked back to Ormond Street, by a longish round, for I chose the quietest streets rather than the nearest way.

"'More than happy,' she answered softly. 'I was talking with my father's spirit.'

"'You still believe in the communion of the dead and the living,' I said, 'in spite of the tricks your German friends played upon you?'

"'Yes,' she answered steadfastly, 'I still believe. I shall always believe there is a bridge between earth and heaven—between the world we can see and touch and the world we can only feel with our hearts and minds. When I hear music like that we heard just now—those long-drawn singing notes on the violin, those deep organ tones of the 'cello—I feel myself carried away to a shadowy world where I know my father and mother are waiting for me. We shall all be together again some day, and I shall know and understand, and I shall feel her soft touch upon my forehead and my hair as I have felt it so often in my dreams.'

"She broke down, crying softly as she walked by my side. I soothed her as well as I could, soothed her most when I talked of those she had lost, questioning her about them. She remembered her mother dimly—a long, last illness, a pale and wasted face, and gentle hands and loving arms that used to be folded round her neck as she nestled against the sick-bed. That sick-room, and the dim light of wintry afternoons, and the sound of the harmonium as her father played soft music in an adjoining parlour, were things that seemed to have lasted for years. She could not look behind them. Her memory of mother and of home stopped on the threshold of that dimly lighted room.

"Her father was a memory of yesterday. He had been her second self, the other half of her mind.

"'He believed in ghosts,' she said, 'and in second sight. He has often told me how he saw my mother coming downstairs to meet him, with a shroud showing faintly above her white summer gown,

the night before she broke a blood-vessel and took to her bed in her last illness.'

"'An optical delusion, no doubt; but it comes natural to a Scotchman to believe such things. He should not have told you.'

"'Why not? I like to know that the world we cannot see is near us. I should have died of loneliness if I had not believed my father's spirit was still within reach. I don't mind about those people being impostors. I begin to think that the friends we have lost would hardly talk to us through the moving up and down of wooden tables. It seems such a foolish way, does it not?'

"'Worse than foolish; undignified. The ghosts in Virgil move and talk with a stately grandeur; Shakespeare's ghosts are kingly and awful. They strike terror. It has remained for the nineteenth century to imagine ghosts that flit about a shabby parlour and skip from side to side of the room and flutter round a table, and touch, and rap, and tap, and pat with viscous hands, like the touch of a toad. Samuel Johnson would not have sat up a whole night to see a table heaved up and down, or to be touched on the forehead by a chilly, unknown hand.'

"'I don't care what you say about those things,' she answered resolutely. 'There is a link between life and death. I don't know what the link is; but though my father may be dead to all the world besides he is not dead to me.'

"I did not oppose stubborn common sense to this fond delusion. It might be good for her to believe in the things that are not. The tender fancy might bridge over the dark gulf of sorrow. I tried to divert her mind to lighter subjects—talked to her of this monstrous London of which she knew nothing and of which I knew very little.

"On the following evening I took Esperanza and my old nurse to a theatre, a form of entertainment in which Martha especially delighted. I was not very happy in my choice of a play. Had I taken my *protégée* to see Jefferson, she would have been touched and delighted. Unluckily I chose another theatre where a burlesque was being played which was just a shade more vulgar than the average burlesque of those days. Esperanza was puzzled and disgusted. I discovered that her love of music was an exclusive passion. She cared for nothing else in the way of art. I tried her with a picture-gallery, only to find her ignorant and indifferent. Two things only impressed her in the whole of the National Gallery —a landscape of Turner's and a face which recalled her father's.

"My last Sunday before term began was spent almost entirely

with Esperanza. I accepted Martha's invitation to partake of her Sunday dinner, and sat at meat with dear old Benjamin for the first time in my life, though I had eaten many a meal with his worthy wife in the days when my legs reached a very little way below the table and my manners were in sore need of the good soul's supervision—happy childish days, before governess and lesson-books had appeared upon the scene of my life; days in which life was one long game of play, interrupted only by childish illnesses, which were like bad dreams, troubled and indistinct patches on the fair foreground of the childish memory. The good Benjamin ate his roast beef in a deprecating and apologetic attitude, sitting, I fear uncomfortably, on the edge of his chair. Esperanza ate about as much solid food as a singing bird might have done; but she looked stronger and in better health than on the night of the *séance*, and she looked almost happy. After the roast beef and apple-tart, I took her to an afternoon service at St. Paul's, where the organ-music filled her with rapture.

"'I shall come here every Sunday,' she said, as we left the cathedral.

"I entreated her not to go so far alone, and warned her that the streets of London were full of danger for youth and inexperience; but she laughed at my fears, assuring me that she had walked about the meadows and coppices round Besbery ever since she could remember, and no harm had ever befallen her, though there were hardly any people about. I told her that in London the people were the danger, and exacted her promise that she would never go beyond the immediate neighbourhood of Great Ormond Street by herself. I gave her permission to walk about Queen's Square, Guilford Street, and Mecklenburgh Square. The neighbourhood was quiet and respectable.

"'I am bound to obey you,' she answered meekly. 'I owe you so much gratitude for your goodness to me.'

"I protested against gratitude to *me*. The only friend to whom she owed anything was my dear old nurse.

"I had a great terror of the perils of the London streets for a girl of her appearance. It was not so much that she was beautiful, but because of a certain strangeness and exceptional character in her beauty which would be likely to attract attention and arouse curiosity. The dreamy look in the large violet eyes, the semi-transparent pallor which suggested an extreme fragility, the unworldliness of her whole aspect were calculated to appeal to the

worst instincts of the prowling profligate. She had an air of helplessness which would invite persecution from the cowardly wretches who make the streets of a great city perilous for unprotected innocence.

"She was ready to promise anything that would please me.

"'I do not care if I never go out,' she said simply. 'The lady who lives in the drawing-room has a harmonium, and she has told me I may play upon it every day—all day long, when she is out; and she has a great many friends, and visits a good deal.'

"'Oh, but you must go out-of-doors for your health's sake!' I protested. 'Martha or Benjamin must go with you.'

"'They have no time to go out-of-doors till after dark, poor things! they are so busy; but they will take me for a walk sometimes of an evening. I shall make them go out, for their own sakes. You need not feel anxious about me; you are too kind to think of me at all.'

"I could not help feeling anxious about her. I felt as if I were responsible for everything that could assail or hurt her; that every hair of her head was a charge upon my conscience. Her health, her happiness, her talents and tastes and fancies—it was mine to care for all of these. My *protégée*, Standish called her. In this farewell walk through the dull Sunday streets, in the dull October twilight, it seemed as if she were much more than my *protégée*—my dearest, most sacred care, the purpose and the promise of my life.

"To-night we were to say good-bye. We were to have parted at the door in Great Ormond Street; but, standing on the doorstep, waiting for the opening of that inexorable door, which would swallow her up presently, like a tomb, I felt all at once that I could not sacrifice this last evening. Standish was dining out. There would only be loneliness and a roast chicken awaiting me at half-past seven. The chicken might languish uneaten; the ghosts might have the dull, commonplace room; I would finish the evening with Martha's tea and toast, and hear Esperanza sing her favourite numbers of Handel and Mendelssohn, to the accompaniment of an ancient Stoddart piano, a relic of the schoolroom in my Suffolk home, the piano on which my mother took her first music-lesson.

"It was an evening in Elysium. A back parlour is sometimes large enough to contain paradise. I did not question my own heart, or analyze my beatific sensations. I ascribed at least half my happiness to Handel and Mendelssohn, and that feeling of exaltation

which only sacred music can produce. There were no anxious questionings in my mind till after I had said good-bye to Esperanza —good-bye—till the third week in December, and had left tho house. Those uneasy questionings were inspired by my dear old Martha, who opened the hall door for me, and said gravely, as I shook hands with her—

"'It would never do, Mr. George. I know what kind of lady your mother is, as well as anybody. It would never do.'

"I did not ask her what it was that would never do; but I carried a new sense of trouble and difficulty out into the autumn wind.

CHAPTER XX.

"A WHITE STAR MADE OF MEMORY LONG AGO."

"'It would never do.' Those words of Martha's, so earnestly spoken by the kind soul who cared for me almost as tenderly as a mother cares for her own, haunted me all through the rapid run to Cambridge, walked the quadrangles of Trinity with me, tramped the Trumpington Road upon my shoulders, like that black care which sits behind the traveller. 'It would never do.' No need to ask my good Martha for the meaning of that emphatic assertion. I knew what shape her thoughts had taken as she watched me sitting by the little square piano—the old, old piano, with such a thin, tinkling sound, listening to that seraphic voice, and looking at that delicate profile and exquisite colouring of faintly flushed cheek, lifted eye, and shadowy hair. My old nurse had surprised my secret almost before I knew it myself; but, by the time I was back in my shabby ground-floor sitting-room at Trinity, I knew as well as Martha knew that I had let myself fall deep in love with a girl whom I could never marry with my mother's approbation. I might take my own way in life and marry the girl I loved; but to do so would be to forfeit my mother's affection, to make myself an outcast from her house.

"'I know what kind of a lady your mother is,' said Martha, in her valedictory address.

"Was I, her son, likely to be ignorant of the mother's character, or unable to gauge the strength of her prejudices—prejudices that

seemed so much a part of her nature as to form a strong argument against Locke's assertion that there are no innate ideas? Indeed, in reading that philosopher's famous chapter, it always seemed to me, that if the average infant had to begin the A B C of life at the first letter, my mother must have been born with her brain richly stocked with family pride and social distinctions. In all the years I had lived with her I had never seen her unbend to a servant, or converse on equal terms with a tradesman. She had a full appreciation of the value of wealth when it was allied with good birth; but the millionaire manufacturer or the lucky speculator belonged to that outer circle of which she knew nothing, and of which she would believe no good.

"I was her only son; and she was a widow. I owed her more than most sons owe their mothers. I did not stand as number four or five in a family circle, taking my share in the rough and tumble of family life. My mother had been all in all to me; and I had been all in all to her. I had been her friend and companion from the time I was able to understand the English language, the recipient of all her ideas, her likes and dislikes—from that early stage when the childish mind unconsciously takes shape and bent from the mind of the parent the child loves best. From my seventh year I was fatherless, and all that is sacred and sweet in home life began and ended for me with the word mother.

"My mother was what Gerald Standish called 'a masterful woman,' a woman to whom it was natural to direct and initiate the whole business of life. My father was her opposite in temperament, —irresolute, lymphatic; and I think he must have handed her the reins of home government before their honeymoon was over. I remember him just well enough to remember that he left the direction of his life wholly to her; that he deferred to her judgment, and studied her feelings in every detail of his existence; and that he obviously adored her. I don't think he cared very much for me, his only child. I can recall no indication of warmth of feeling on his part, only a placid indifference, as of one whose affection was concentrated upon a single object, and whose heart had no room for any other image. He spoke of me as 'the boy,' and looked at me occasionally with an air of mild wonder, as if I were somebody else's son, whose growth took him by surprise. I never remember his expressing any opinion about me, except that I had grown since he looked at me last.

"His feeling about me being thus tepid, it was hardly surprising

that he should make what many people have called an unjust will. I have never disputed its justice, for I loved my mother too much to complain of the advantages of power and status which that will gave her.

"She was an heiress, and her money had cleared my father's estate from considerable encumbrances, and no doubt he remembered this when providing for her future. He was her senior by five and twenty years, and foresaw a long widowhood for her.

"The entail ended in his own person, so he was free to dispose of his property as he liked. He left my mother tenant for life; and he left me five hundred a year, chargeable to the estate, which income was only to begin when I came of age. Till my one-and-twentieth birthday I was dependent upon my mother for everything.

"I told myself that I had to cut out my own path in life, and that I must be the architect of my own fortune.

"My mother's income, under her marriage settlement, was considerable, and this, in addition to a rent-roll of between two and three thousand a year, made her a rich woman.

"Assuredly I was not in a position to make an imprudent marriage, since my power to maintain a wife and family in accord with my own ideas of a gentleman's surroundings must depend for a considerable time upon my mother's liberality. I had made up my mind to go to the Bar, and I knew how slow and arduous is the road to success in that branch of the legal profession; but far nearer than mere questions of interest was the obligation which filial love laid upon me. My mother had given me the devotion of years, had made me the chief object of her thoughts and her hopes, and I should be an ungrateful wretch if I were to disappoint her. I knew, alas! that upon this very question of marriage she cherished a project that it would distress her to forego, and that there was a certain Lady Emily whom I was intended to marry, the daughter of a nobleman who had been my father's most intimate friend, and for whom my mother had a greater regard than for any of our neighbours.

"Knowing this, and wishing with all my heart to do my duty as a son to the best of mothers, I could but echo Martha's solemn words—

"'It would never do.'

"No, 'it would never do.' The seraphic voice, the spiritual countenance, the appealing helplessness, which had so moved my pity, must be to me as a dream from which I had awakened.

Esperanza's fate must rest henceforward with herself, aided by honest Martha Blake, and helped, through Martha, from my purse. I must never see her again. No word had been spoken, no hint had been given of the love which it was my bounden duty to conquer and forget. I could contemplate the inevitable renunciation with a clear conscience.

"I worked harder in that term than I had worked yet, and shut my door against all the allurements of undergraduate friends and all the pleasures of university life. I was voted churlish and a muff; but I found my books the best cure for an unhappy love; and though the image of Miss Campbell was oftener with me than the learned shade of Newton or the later ghost of Whewell, I contrived to do some really good work.

"My mother and I wrote to each other once a week. She expected me to send her a budget of gossip and opinion, and it was only in this term that I began to feel a difficulty in filling two sheets of note-paper with my niggling penmanship. For the first time in my life, I found myself sitting, pen in hand, with nothing to say to my mother. I could not write about Esperanza, or the passionate yearning which I was trying to outlive. I could hardly expatiate upon my mathematical studies to a woman who, although highly cultivated, knew nothing of mathematics. I eked out my letter as best I could, with a laboured criticism upon a feeble novel which I had idly skimmed in an hour of mental exhaustion.

"I looked forward apprehensively to my home-going in December, fearing that some change in my outward aspect might betray the mystery of my heart. The holiday, once so pleasant, would be long and dull. The shooting would afford some relief perhaps, and I made up my mind to tramp the plantations all day long. At Cambridge I had shirked physical exercise; in Suffolk I would walk down my sorrow.

"A letter from my mother, which reached me early in December, put an end to these resolves. She had been somewhat out of health all through November; and her local medical man, who was old and *passé*, had only tormented her with medicines which made her worse. She had therefore decided, at Miss Marjorum's earnest desire, upon spending my vacation in London; and Jebson, her trusty *major domo*, had been up to town, and had found her delightful lodgings on the north side of Hyde Park. She would await me, not at Fendyke, but in Connaught Place.

"Connaught Place—within less than an hour's walk of Great

Ormond Street! My heart beat fast and furiously at the mere thought of that propinquity. Martha's latest letter had told me that all attempts at finding a situation for my *protégée* had so far been without result. Martha and her charge had visited all the agencies for the placing of governesses and companions, and no agent had succeeded in placing Esperanza. Her education was far below the requirements of the least exacting employer. She knew very little French, and no German; she played exquisitely, but she played by ear; of the theory of music she knew hardly anything. Her father, an enthusiast and a dreamer, had filled her with ideas, but had taught her nothing that would help her to earn a living.

"'Don't you fret about her, Mr. George,' wrote Martha. 'As long as I have a roof over my head, she can make her home with me. Her bite and sup makes hardly any difference in the week's expenses. I'm only sorry, for her sake, that she isn't clever enough to get into a nice family in some pretty country house, like Fendyke. It's a dull life for her here—a back parlour to live in, and two old people for her only companions.

"I thought of the small dark parlour in the Bloomsbury lodging-house, the tinkling old piano, the dull grey street; a weary life for a girl of poetic temperament reared in the country. That letter of Martha's, and the fact of being within an easy walk of Great Ormond Street, broke down my resolution of the last two months. I called upon Martha and her charge on the morning after I left Cambridge. I thought Esperanza looking wan and out of health, and could but mark how the pale, sad face flushed and brightened at sight of me. We were alone for a few minutes, while Martha interviewed a butcher, and I seized the opportunity. I said I feared she was not altogether happy. Only unhappy in being a burden to my friends, she told me. She was depressed by finding her own uselessness. Hundreds of young women were earning their living as governesses, but no one would employ her.

"'No lady will even give me a trial,' she said. 'I'm afraid I must look very stupid.'

"'You look very lovely,' I answered hotly. 'They want a commoner clay.'

"I implored her to believe that she was no burden to Martha or to me. If she could be content to live that dull and joyless life, she was at least secure of a safe and respectable home; and if she cared to carry on her education, something might be done in the way of masters; or she might attend some classes in Harley Street, or elsewhere.

"She turned red and then pale, and I saw tears trembling on her long auburn lashes.

"'I am afraid I am unteachable,' she faltered, with downcast eyes. 'Kind ladies at Besbery tried to teach me; but it was no use. My mind always wandered. I could not keep my thoughts upon the book I was reading, or on what they told me. Miss Grimshaw, who wanted to help me, said I was incorrigibly idle and atrociously obstinate. But, indeed, it was not idleness or obstinacy that kept me from learning. I could not force myself to think or to remember. My thoughts would only go their own way; and I cared for nothing but music, or for the poetry my father used to read to me sometimes of an evening. I am afraid Miss Grimshaw was right, and that I ought to be a dressmaker.'

"I glanced at the hands which lay loosely clasped upon the arm of the chair in which she was sitting. Such delicately tapering fingers were never meant for the dressmaker's workroom. The problem of Esperanza's life was not to be solved that way.

"I did not remain long on this first morning; but I went again two days afterwards, and again, until it came to be every day. Martha grumbled and warned me of my danger, and of the wrong done to Esperanza, if I were to make her care for me.

"'I don't think there's much fear of that,' added Martha. 'She's too much in the clouds. It's you I'm afraid of. You and me knows who mamma wants you to marry, don't us, Mr. George?'

"I could not gainsay Martha upon this point. Lady Emily and I had ridden the same rocking-horse; she riding pillion with her arms clasped round my waist, while I urged the beast to his wildest pace. We had taken tea out of the same toy tea-things—her tea-things—and before I was fifteen years of age my mother told me that she was pleased to see I was so fond of Emily, and hoped that she and I would be husband and wife some day, in the serious future, just as we were little lovers now in the childish present.

"I remember laughing at my mother's speech, and thinking within myself that Emily and I hardly realized my juvenile idea of lovers. The romantic element was entirely wanting in our association. When I talked of Lady Emily, later, to Gerald Standish, I remember I described her as 'a good sort,' and discussed her excellent qualities of mind and temper with an unembarrassed freedom which testified to a heart that was at peace.

"I felt more mortified than I would have cared to confess at Martha's blunt assurance that Esperanza was too much in the

clouds to care about me; and it may be that this remark of my old nurse's gave just the touch of pique that acted as a spur to passion. I know that after two or three afternoons in Great Ormond Street, I felt that I loved this girl as I could never love again, and that henceforward it would be impossible for me to contemplate the idea of life without her. The more fondly I loved her, the less demonstrative I became, and my growing reserve threw dust in the elderly eyes that watched us. Martha believed that her warning had taken effect, and she so far confided in my discretion as to allow me to take Esperanza for lamp-lit walks in the Bloomsbury squares, after our cosy tea-drinking in the little back parlour. The tea-drinking and the walk became an institution. Martha's rheumatics had made walking exercise impossible for her during the last month. Benjamin was fat and lazy.

"'If I didn't let the poor child go out with you, she'd hardly get a breath of fresh air all the winter. And I know that I can trust you, Mr. George,' said Martha.

"'Yes, you can trust me,' answered I.

"She might trust me to breathe no word of evil into the ear of her I loved. She could trust me to revere the childlike innocence which was my darling's highest charm. She could trust me to be loyal and true to Esperanza. But she could not trust me to be worldly-wise, or to sacrifice my own happiness to filial affection. The time came when I had to set my love for Esperanza against my duty to my mother and my own interests. Duty and interest kicked the beam.

"Oh, those squares! those grave old Bloomsbury squares, with their formal rows of windows, and monotonous iron railings, and stately doorways, and clean doorsteps, and enclosures of trees, whose blackened branches showed leafless against the steely sky of a frosty evening! What groves or streams of paradise could be fairer to us two than the dull pavements which we paced arm-in-arm in the wintry greyness, telling each other those thoughts and fancies which seemed in their intuitive sympathy to mark us for predestined life-companions. Her thoughts were childishly expressed sometimes; but it seemed to me always as if they were only my thoughts in a feminine guise. Nothing that she said ever jarred upon me; and her ignorance of the world and all its ways suggested some nymph or fairy reared in the seclusion of woodland or ocean cave. I thought of Endymion, and I fancied that his goddess could have been scarcely less of the earth than this fair girl who walked beside me, confiding in me with a childlike faith.

"One night I told her that I loved her. We had stayed out later than usual. The clock of St. George's Church was striking nine, and in the shadowy quiet of Queen's Square my lips met hers in love's first kiss. How shyly and how falteringly she confessed her own secret, so carefully guarded till that moment.

"'I never thought you could care for a poor girl like me,' she said; 'but I loved you from the first. Yes, almost from the very first. My heart seemed frozen after my father's death, and your voice was the first that thawed it. The dull, benumbed feeling gradually passed away, and I knew that I had some one living to love and care for and think about as I sat alone. I had a world of new thoughts to interweave with the music I love.'

"'Ah, that music, Esperanza! I am almost jealous of music when I see you so moved and influenced by it.'

"'Music would have been my only consolation if you had not cared for me," she answered simply.

"'But I do care for you, and I want you to be my wife, now at once—as soon as we can be married.'

"I talked about an immediate marriage before the registrar. But, willing as she was to be guided by me in most things, she would not consent to this.

"'It would not seem like marriage to me,' she said, 'if we did not stand before the altar.'

"'Well, it shall be in a church, then; only we shall have to wait longer. And I must go back to Cambridge at the end of this week. I must get an exeat, and come up to London on our wedding-day, and take you home in the evening. I shall have a quiet home ready for my darling, far from the ken of dons and undergraduates, but within an easy distance of the 'Varsity.

"I explained to her that our marriage must be a secret till I came of age next year, or till I could find a favourable opportunity of breaking the fact to my mother.

"'Will she mind? Will she be angry?' asked Esperanza.

"'Not when she comes to know you, dear love.'

"Well, as I knew my mother's character, I was infatuated enough to believe what I said. Where was the heart so stony that would not warm to that fair and gentle creature? Where the pride so stubborn which that tender influence could not bend?

"I had the banns put up at the church of St. George the Martyr, assured that Martha's rheumatism and Benjamin's lethargic temper would prevent either of them attending the morning service on any

of the three fateful Sundays. If Martha went to church at all, she crept there in the evening, after tea. She liked the gaslights and the evening warmth, the short prayers, and the long sermon, and she met her own class among the congregation. I felt tolerably safe about the banns.

Had my mother been in good health, it would have been difficult for me to spend so many of my evenings away from home; but the neuralgic affection which had troubled her in Suffolk had not been subjugated by the great Dr. Gull's treatment, and she passed a good deal of her life in her own rooms and in semi-darkness, ministered to by a lady who had been a member of our household ever since my father's death, and whose presence had been the only drawback to my home happiness.

"This lady was my mother's governess—Miss Marjorum—a woman of considerable brain power, wide knowledge of English and German literature, and a style of pianoforte playing which always had the effect of cold water down my back. And yet Miss Marjorum played correctly. She introduced no discords into that hard, dry music, which seemed to me to have been written expressly for her hard and precise finger-tips, bony knuckles, and broad, strong hand, with a thumb which she boasted of as resembling Thalberg's. In a difficult and complicated movement Miss Marjorum's thumb worked wonders. It was ubiquitous; it turned under and over, and rapped out sharp staccato notes in the midst of presto runs, or held rigid semibreves while the active fingers fired volleys of chords, or raced the bass with lightning triplets. In whatever entanglement of florid ornament Liszt or Thalberg had wrapped up a melody, Miss Marjorum's thumb could search it out and drum it into her auditors.

"Miss Marjorum was on the wrong side of fifty. She had a squat figure and a masculine countenance, and her voice was deep and strong, like the voice of a man. She dressed with a studious sobriety in dark cloth or in grey alpaca, according to the seasons, and in the evening she generally wore plaid poplin, which ruled her square, squat figure into smaller squares. I have observed an affinity between plain people and plaid poplin.

"Miss Marjorum was devoted to my mother; and antagonistic as her nature was to me in all things, and blighting as was her influence upon the fond dream of my youth, I am bound to record that she was conscientious in carrying out her own idea of duty. Her idea of duty unhappily included no indulgence for youthful impulses, and she disapproved of every independent act of mine.

"My evening absences puzzled her.

"'I wonder you can like to be out nearly every evening when your mother is so ill,' she remarked severely, on my return to Connaught Place after that glimpse of paradise in Queen Square.

"'If I could be of any use to my mother by staying at home, you may be sure I should not be out, Miss Marjorum," I replied, rather stiffly.

"'It would be a satisfaction to your mother to know you were under her roof, even when she is obliged to be resting quietly in her own room.'

"'Unfortunately my mathematical coach lives under another roof, and I have to accommodate myself to his hours.'

"This was sophistication; but it was true that I read mathematics with an ex-senior wrangler in South Kensington every other day.

"'Do you spend *every* evening with your coach?' asked Miss Marjorum, looking up suddenly from her needlework, and fixing me with her cold grey eye.

"'Certainly not. You know the old saw—"All work and no play——"'

"'And how do you amuse yourself when you are not at South Kensington? I did not think you knew many people in London.'

"'That is because I know very few people whom you know. My chief friends are the friends of my college life—not the worthy bucolics of Suffolk.'

Miss Marjorum sighed, and went on with her sewing. She delighted in the plainest of plain work—severest undergarments of calico or flannel. She had taken upon herself to supply my mother's poorer cottage-tenants with underclothing—a very worthy purpose; but I could not help wishing she had deferred a little more to the universal sense of beauty in her contributions to the cottagers' wardrobes. Surely those prison-like garments must have appalled their recipients. My inexperienced eye noted only their ugliness in shape and coarseness of texture. I longed for a little trimming, a softer quality of flannel.

"'I am afraid they must hurt the people who get them,' I said one day, when Miss Marjorum exhibited her bale of flannel-underwear.

"'They are delightfully warm, and friction is beneficial to health,' she replied severely. 'I don't know what *more* you would have.'

"It irked me not a little to note Miss Marjorum's suspicious

air when she discussed my evening occupations, for I knew she had more influence over my mother than any one living, and I fancied that she would not scruple to use that influence against me. I had lost her friendship long ago by childish rudenesses, which I looked back upon with regret, but which I could not obliterate from her memory by the studious civilities of later years.

"I went back to Cambridge, and my mother and her devoted companion left Connaught Place for Brighton, Dr. Gull having strongly recommended sea-air, after exhausting his scientific means in the weary battle with nerve pain. It was a relief to me, when I thought of Esperanza, to know that Miss Marjorum was fifty miles away from Great Ormond Street. Those suspicious glances and prying questions of hers had frightened me.

"When I thought of Esperanza!—when was she not the centre and circumference of my thoughts? I worked hard; missed no lecture; neglected no opportunity; for I had made up my mind to play the game of life off my own bat; but Esperanza's image was with me whatever I was doing. I think I mixed up her personality in an extraordinary fashion with the higher mathematics. She perched like a fairy upon every curve, or slid sylph-like along every line. I weighed her, and measured her, and calculated the doctrine of chances about her. She became in my mind the ruling, and to common eyes, invisible spirit of the science of quantity and number.

"Could this interval between the asking in church and my wedding-day be any other than a period of foolish dreaming, of fond confusion and wandering thoughts? I was not twenty-one, and I was about to take a step which would inevitably offend my only parent, the only being to whom I stood indebted for care and affection. In the rash hopefulness of a youthful passion, I made sure of being ultimately forgiven; but, hopeful as I was, I knew it might be some time before I could obtain pardon. In the meantime, I had an income which would suffice for a youthful *ménage*. I would find a quiet home for Esperanza at one of the villas on the Grandchester Road till I had taken my degree, and then I should have to begin work in London. Indeed, I had fixed in my own mind upon a second-floor in Martha's roomy old house, which would be conveniently near the Temple, where I might share a modest set of chambers with a Cambridge friend. In the deep intoxication of my love-dream, Great Ormond Street seemed just the most delightful spot in which to establish the cosy home I

figured to myself. It would be an infinite advantage to live under my dear old nurse's roof, and to know that she would watch over my girl-wife while I sat waiting for briefs in my dingy chambers, or reading law with an eminent Q.C.

"I had asked Esperanza on the night of our betrothal whether she thought we could live upon five hundred a year. A ripple of laughter preluded her reply.

"'Dear George, do you know what my father's income was?' she asked. 'Sixty-five pounds a year. He paid fifteen pounds a year for our cottage and garden—such a dear old garden—and we had to live and clothe ourselves upon the other fifty pounds. He was very shabby sometimes, poor darling; but we were always happy. Though I seem so helpless in getting my own living, I think I could keep house for you, and not waste your money. Five hundred a year! Why, you are immensely rich!'

"I told her that I should be able to add to our income by the time we had been married a few years, and then we would have a house in the country, and a garden, and a pair of ponies for her to drive, and cows and poultry, and all the things that women love. What a happy dream it was, and how the sweet pale face brightened under the lamp-light as she listened to me.

"'I want nothing but your love;' she said, 'nothing. I am not afraid of poverty.'

"The three weeks were gone. I got an exeat, and went up to London by an early train. I had directed Esperanza to meet me at the church, whose doors we had so often passed together in our evening walks, and where we had knelt side by side one Sunday evening. She was to take Martha to church with her; but not till the last moment, not till they were at the church door was she to tell my old nurse what was going to happen, lest an idea of duty to the mother should induce her to betray the son.

"The air was crisp and bright, and the wintry landscape basked in the wintry sun between Cambridge and Stratford, but the dull greyness of our metropolitan winter wrapped me round when I left Bishopsgate Street, and there was a thin curtain of fog hanging over my beloved Bloomsbury when my hansom rattled along the sober old-world streets to the heavy Georgian church. I sprang from the cab as if I had worn Mercury's sandals, told the man to wait, and ran lightly up the steps, pushed back the heavy door and entered the dark temple, hushed and breathless. How solemn and cold and ghostly the church looked, how grey and pale the great cold

windows. The fog seemed thicker here than in the streets outside; and the dreary fane was empty.

"I looked at my watch. Twenty minutes to eleven. I had entreated her to be at the church at least ten minutes before the hour; and I felt bitterly disappointed that she had not anticipated the appointment.

"Her last letter was three days old. Could she be ill? could any evil thing have happened? I hurried back to the church door, intending to get into my cab and drive to Ormond Street. I changed my mind before I had crossed the threshold. I might miss her on the way—drive by one street while she and Martha were walking another. Again, there was something undignified in a bridegroom rushing off in search of his bride. My place was to wait in the church. I had seen a good many weddings in our parish church in Suffolk, and I knew that the bride was almost always late. Yet, in spite of this experience, I had expected my bride in advance of the appointed time. She had no wreath of orange-blossoms, no bridal veil to adjust, no doting mother, or sister bridesmaids to flurry and hinder her under the pretence of helping. She had no carriage to wait for. Her impatience to see me after nearly three weeks should have brought her to the church earlier than this.

"Then I remembered Martha. No doubt she was waiting for Martha. That good soul was interviewing the butcher, or adjusting her Paisley shawl, while I was fretting and fuming in the church. I had no best man to reason with my impatience and keep up my spirits. My best man was to be the parish clerk, and he had not yet appeared upon the scene. I saw a pew-opener creeping about, a pew-opener in the accustomed close black bonnet and sober apparel. Esperanza's bridesmaid! Martha would have to give her away.

"I took a turn round the church, looked at the monuments, and even stood still to read a tablet here and there, and knew no more of the inscription after I had read it than if it had been in choice Assyrian.

"I opened the heavy door and went out on to the steps, and stood watching a stray cab or a stray pedestrian, dimly visible through the thickening fog. I looked at my watch every other minute, between anger and despair. It was five minutes to eleven. The curate who was to marry us passed me on the steps and went into the church, unsuspecting that I was to be the chief actor in the ceremony. I stood looking along the street, in the only direc-

tion in which my bride was to be expected, and my heart sickened as the slow minutes wore themselves out, till it was nearly a quarter-past eleven.

"I could endure this no longer. My hansom was waiting on the opposite side of the street. I lifted my finger, and signed to the driver to come over to me. There was nothing for it but to go to Great Ormond Street, and discover the cause of delay.

"Before the man could climb into his seat and cross the road, a brougham drove sharply up to the church steps—a brougham of dingy aspect, driven by a man whose livery branded him as a flyman.

"I was astonished at the fly, but never doubted that it brought me my dear love, and my heart was light again, and I ran to greet her with a welcoming smile.

"The carriage door was sharply opened from within, and my mother stepped out and stood before me, tall and grave, in her neat dark travelling dress, her fine features sharp and clear in the wintry gloom.

"'Mother!' I exclaimed aghast.

"'I know I am not the person you expected, George,' she said quietly. 'Badly as you have behaved to me, I am sorry for your disappointment.'

"'Where is Esperanza?' I cried, unheeding my mother's address.

"It was only afterwards that her words came back to me—in that long dull afterwards when I had leisure to brood over every detail in this agonizing scene.

"'She is safe, and in good hands, and she is where you will never see her again.'

"'That's a lie!' I cried. "If she is among the living, I will find her—if she is dead, I will follow her.'

"'You are violent and unreasonable; but I suppose your foolish passion must excuse you. When you have read this letter, you will be calmer, I hope.'

"She gave me a letter in Esperanza's writing. We had moved a few paces from the church steps while we talked. I read the letter, walking slowly along the street, my mother at my side.

"'DEAREST,—

"'I am going away. I am not to be your wife. It was a happy dream, but a foolish one. I should have ruined your life. That has been made clear to me; and I love you far too

dearly to be your enemy. You will never see me again. Don't be unhappy about me. I shall be well cared for. I am going very far away; but if it were to the farthest end of the earth, and if I were to live a hundred years, I should never cease to love you, or learn to love you less.

"'Good-bye for ever,

"'ESPERANZA.'

"'I know whose hand is in this,' I said,—'Miss Marjorum.'

"'Miss Marjorum is my true and loyal friend, and yours too, though you may not believe it.'

"'Whoever it may be who has stolen my love away from me, that person is my dire and deadly foe. Whether the act is yours or hers, it is the act of my bitterest enemy, and I shall ever so remember it. Look here, mother, let there be no misunderstanding between you and me. I love this girl better than my life. Whatever trick you have played upon her, whatever cajoleries you and Miss Marjorum have brought to bear upon her, whatever false representations you may have made, appealing to her unselfishness against her love, you have done that which will wreck your son's life unless you can undo it.'

"'I have saved my son from the shipwreck his own folly would have made of his life,' my mother answered calmly. 'I have seen what these unequal marriages come to—before the wife is thirty.'

"'It would be no unequal marriage. The girl I love is a lady.'

"'A village organist's daughter, by her own confession totally without education. A pretty delicate young creature with a certain surface refinement, I grant you; but do you think *that* would stand the wear and tear of life, or counterbalance your humiliation when people asked questions about your wife's antecedents and belongings? People, even the politest people, *will* ask those questions, George. My dear, dear boy, the thing you were to have done to-day would have been utter ruin to your social existence for the next fifty years. You will never be rich enough or great enough to live down such a marriage.'

"'Don't preach to me,' I cried savagely. 'You have broken my heart. Surely that is enough for you.'

"I broke away from her as she laid her hand upon my arm—such a shapely hand in a dark grey glove. I remembered even in that moment of anguish and of anger how my dear love had often walked

by my side, gloveless, shabbier than a milliner's apprentice. No, she was not of my mother's world; no more was Titania. She belonged to the realm of romance and *féerie*; not to Belgravia or Mayfair.

"I ran back to the spot where the hansom still waited for me, jumped in, and told the man to drive to Great Ormond Street. I left my mother standing on the pavement, to find her way back to her carriage as she could, to go where she would.

"I knocked at the lodging-house door loud enough to wake the seven sleepers. I pushed past the scared maid-servant, and dashed into Martha's parlour. She was sitting with her spectacles on her nose poring over a tradesman's book, and with other books of the same kind on the table before her.

"'Martha, this is your doing,' I said. 'You betrayed me to my mother!'

"'Oh, Mr. George, forgive your old nurse that loves you as if you were her own flesh and blood. I only did my duty by you and my mistress. It would never have done, dear; it would never have done.'

"She called me 'dear,' as in the old nursery days. Tears were streaming down her withered cheeks.

"'It was you, then?"

"'Yes, it was me, Mr. George, leastways me and Benjamin. We talked it over a long time before he wrote the letter to my mistress at Brighton. Sarah came home from church on Sunday dinner-time. The drawing-rooms were dining out, and the second floor is empty, so there was nothing to hinder Sarah's going to church. She came home at dinner-time, and told me you and Esperanza Campbell had been asked in church—for the third time. You might have knocked me down with a feather. I never thought she could be so artful. I talked it over with Benjamin, and he posted a letter that night.'

"'And Miss Marjorum came up from Brighton next morning, and came to see Esperanza?'

"'How did you know that, Mr. George?'

"'I know Miss Marjorum.'

"'Yes, it was Miss Marjorum that came. She asked to see Esperanza alone, and they were shut up together for over an hour, and then the bell was rung, and Miss Marjorum told the girl to pack up Miss Campbell's things, bring her box down to the hall, and when she had done that, to fetch a four-wheeler. Sarah was nearly as upset as I was, but she and I packed the things between

us—such a few things, poor child—and carried the box downstairs, and I waited in the hall while Sarah ran for the cab. And presently Esperanza came out with Miss Marjorum, and put on her hat and jacket, and then came to bid me good-bye.

"'She put her arms round my neck and kissed me, and though I had done my duty by you and your ma, Mr. George, I felt like Judash. "It was right of you to tell," she said; "it was only right—for his sake," and Miss Marjorum hurried her down the steps and into the cab before she could say another word. I do believe the poor dear child gave you up without a murmur, Mr. George, because she knew that it would have been your ruin to marry her.'

"'Fudge! That had been drummed into her by Miss Marjorum. You have done me the worst turn you ever did any one in your life, Martha; and yet I thought if there was anybody in the world I could trust it was you. Where did the cab go—do you know that?'

"'Charing Cross Station. I heard Miss Marjorum give the order.'"

CHAPTER XXI.

"AND THAT UNREST WHICH MEN MISCALL DELIGHT."

ALLAN went back to Matcham sobered by grief, and longing for the comfort his betrothed could give him, the comfort of sympathy and gentle words, the deeper comfort in the assurance of her love.

Suzette looked very pale in her black frock when Allan appeared at Marsh House for the first time after his bereavement. They stood side by side in the grey light of a hopelessly dull day, finding but little speech in the sadness of this first meeting.

"My darling, you have been grieving for my grief," he said tenderly, looking into the dark eyes, noting the tired look as of many tears, the sharper line of the cheek, the settled pallor, where a lovely carmine had been wont to come and go like warm light.

"My dearest, you have lost all your roses—and for my sake. For me those dear eyes have known sleepless nights, those lovely cheeks have grown pinched and pale."

"Do you think that I could help being sorry for you, Allan?" she murmured, with downcast eyelids.

"You had no other cause for sorrow, I hope?"

"No, no; only in every life there are saddening intervals. I was

sorry for your sake—sorry that I was never to see your father again. I liked him so much, Allan. And then somehow I got into a low-spirited way, and old Dr. Podmore gave me a tonic which made my head ache. I don't know that it had any other effect."

"Suzette, it was cruel of you not to tell me that you were ill."

"Oh, I was not to say ill. Why should I worry you about such nonsense? I was only below par. That is what Dr. Podmore called it. But please don't talk about me, Allan. Talk to me of yourself and of your poor mother. She is coming to stay with you, I hope?"

"Yes, she is coming to me next week. How is Mrs. Wornock? Do you go to her as much as ever?"

"Almost as much. She seems so dependent upon me for companionship, poor soul. I am the only girl she has taken to—as people say."

"What a wise woman to choose the most charming girl in the world."

"If you said in the Matcham world, it would not be a stupendous compliment."

"Nay, I mean the world. I challenge the universe to produce me a second Suzette. And Geoffrey, your violin player, has he been much at home?"

"Not very much. Please don't call him my violin player. I have not played a single accompaniment for him since you objected. I have been very dutiful."

"Don't talk of duty. It is love that I want, love without alloy; love which, being full of foolishness itself, can forgive a lover's baseless jealousy."

"Allan, have I ever been unforgiving?"

"No, you have borne with my tempers. You have been all that is kind and sweet—but I sometimes wish you would be angry with me. Would that there were a girl in Matcham handsome enough to admit of your jealousy! How desperately I would flirt with that girl!"

Her wan smile was not encouraging.

"Is he still as devoted to his fiddle? Does he talk of Tartini, Spontini, de Beriot, as other men talk of Salisbury or Gladstone?"

"I have seen very little of him; but he is a fanatic about music. He inherits his mother's passion."

"His poor mother," sighed Allan.

"She is so fond of you—almost as fond as she is of her own son."

"That's not possible, Suzie."

"Well, the son must be first, of course; but, indeed, she is very fond of you, Allan."

"Dear soul, it is for old sakes' sake. I'll tell you her poor little innocent secret, Suzie. You, who are the other half of my soul, have a right to know all things which gravely interest me. Only you must be discretion itself, and you must never breathe a word of Mrs. Wornock's story to my mother."

And then he sat down by her side in the comfortable corner by the old-fashioned fireplace, fenced off from all the outer world by a Japanese screen, on which Choti and an army of smaller devils grinned and capered against a black satin background, and he told her tenderly, but only in outline, the story of his father's first love, and Esperanza's all-too-willing sacrifice.

"It was generous—but a mistake," he said in conclusion. "She gave up her own happiness, dashed away the cup of joy when it was at her lips. She was nobly unselfish, and she spoilt two lives. Such sacrifices never answer."

"Do you really believe that, Allan?" asked Suzette, looking at him with a startling intensity.

"I really do. I have never known a case in which self-surrender of that kind has ended well. A man and woman who love each other should be true to each other and their mutual love. All worldly considerations should be as naught. If a man truly loves a beggar-girl, let him marry her; and don't let the beggar-girl draw back under the idea that he would do better by marrying a duchess."

"But if two people love each other—who are otherwise bound and fettered, who cannot be happy without breaking older ties——"

"Ah, that is a different thing. Honour comes into the question, and there must be sacrifices. This world would be a pandemonium if inclination went before honour. I am talking of love weighed against worldly wisdom, against poverty, against rank, race, wealth. You can understand now why Mrs. Wornock's heart went out to me from the beginning of our acquaintance—why she has accepted me almost as a second son."

Allan's Matcham friends were enthusiastic in their welcome, and cordial in their expressions of sympathy. It may be that the increase of means and importance which had come to him by his father's death was no small factor in the opinion of the village and its environs. A man who had an estate in Suffolk, and who lived at Matcham for his own pleasure, was a personage; and Matcham

gossip did not fail to exaggerate the unseen Suffolk estate, and to talk of the Beechhurst property as a mere bagatelle, a windfall from a maternal uncle, hardly worth talking about, as compared with Fendyke and its vast acreage.

"Lady Emily has the house and home-farm for her life," Mrs. Mornington explained, with the privileged air of Allan's intimate friend; "but the bulk of the estate passed at once to Mr. Carew. My niece has done very well for herself, after all."

The last words, carelessly spoken, implied that in the first instance Mr. Carew had been rather a poor match for Miss Vincent.

"I suppose this sad event will delay the marriage?"

"For two or three months, perhaps. They were to have been married at midsummer, when Suzette will come of age; but she tells me she would not think of marrying Allan till at least half a year after his father's death. She talked of a year, but that would be simply absurd. The wedding can be as quiet as they like."

"Yes, of course," murmured assenting friends, sipping Mrs. Mornington's Ceylon tea, and despondently foreseeing the stern necessity of wedding presents, without even the poor compensation of champagne, ices, wedding-cake, and a crowd of fine gowns and new bonnets—positively no equivalent for their money.

Suzette had pleaded hard for a year's delay.

"It would be more respectful to him whom you have lost; and it would be more pleasing to your mother," she said.

"No, Suzette, my mother would rather see me happy than sacrifice my happiness to conventionality. Half a year is a long time for a man whose life seems a thing of shreds and patches, waiting the better fuller life that he longs for. I shall remember my dear father with no less affection; I shall no less regret his loss; when you and I are one. We can be married quietly at nine o'clock in the morning, before Matcham people have finished breakfast, with only your father and aunt, and my mother for witnesses; and we can slip away from the station in the fresh September morning on the first stage of our journey to Como. Such a lovely journey at that season, Suzie! It will still be summer in Italy, and we can stay late in October, till the grapes are all gathered and the berceaus are getting bare, and then we can come back to Matcham to our own cosy fireside, and amuse ourselves with the arrangement of our house. It will be as new to me as it will be to you, Suzie, for only when you are its mistress will it be home."

Suzette could hardly withhold her consent, her lover being so earnest. It was settled that the marriage should take place early in September; and this being decided, the current of life flowed smoothly on, Allan spending more of his days at Marsh House, The Grove, and Discombe, than in his own house, except when Lady Emily was with him.

Discombe was by far the most delightful of these three houses in out-of-door weather, pleasant as were Mrs. Mornington's carefully tended grounds and shrubbery, her verandah and spacious conservatory.

The gardens at Discombe had that delicious flavour of the old world, and that absolute seclusion which can never be enjoyed in grounds that are within ear-shot of a high-road. At Discombe the long grass walks, the walls of ilex and of yew, the cypress avenues, and marble temples were isolated amidst surrounding woods, nearly a mile away from the traffic of everyday life. There was a sense of quiet and privacy here, compared with which Marsh House and The Grove were scarcely superior to the average villa in a newly developed suburb.

The seasons waxed and waned; the month of May, when the woodland walks round Discombe were white with the feathery bloom of the mountain ash, and golden with the scented blossoms of the yellow azalea; and June, which filled the woodland avenues with a flush of purple rhododendrons, masses of bloom, in an ascending scale of colour from the deep bass of darkest purple to the treble of palest lilac; and July, with her lap full of roses that made the gardens a scene of enchantment.

"I always tell the gardeners that if they give me roses I will forgive them all the rest," said Mrs. Wornock, when Allan complimented her upon her banquet of bloom; arches of roses, festoons of roses, temples built of roses, roses in beds and borders, everywhere.

"But your men are model gardeners; they neglect nothing."

In this paradise of flowers Allan and Suzette dawdled away two or three afternoons in every week. Discombe seemed to Allan always something of an enchanted palace—a place upon which there lay a glamour and a spell, a garden of sleep, a grove for woven paces and weaving hands, a spot haunted by sad sweet memories, ruled over by the genius of love, faithful in disappointment. Mrs. Wornock's personality gave an atmosphere of sadness to the house in which she lived, to the gardens in which she paced to and fro with slow, meditative steps; but it was a not unpleasing sadness,

and it suited Allan's mood in this quiet summer of waiting, while grief for the loss of his father was still fresh in his mind.

Lady Emily came to Discombe on several occasions, and now that Mrs. Wornock's shyness had worn off—with all those agitations which were inevitable at a first meeting—the two women were very good friends. It was difficult for any one not to take kindly to Lady Emily Carew, and she on her side was attracted to Mrs. Wornock, fascinated by a nature so different from her own, and by that reserve force of genius which gave fire and pathos to Mrs. Wornock's playing.

Lady Emily listened with moistened eyes to the Sonata Pathetica, and Mrs. Wornock showed a cordial interest in the Blickling Park and Woodbastwick cows—which gave distinction to the Fendyke dairy farm.

"Pure white, with lovely black muzzles—and splendid milkers!" protested Lady Emily. "I was taught that thing you play, dear Mrs. Wornock, but my playing was never good for much, even when I was having two lessons a week from poor Sir Julius. He was only Mr. Benedict when he taught me, and he was almost young."

Geoffrey made meteoric appearances at Discombe during those quiet summer months, and his presence seemed to make everybody uncomfortable. There was a restlessness—a suppressed fever about him which made sensitive people nervous. Dearly though his mother loved him, and gladly as she welcomed his reappearance upon the scene of her life, she was always fluttered and anxious while he was under her roof.

His leave expired early in July, but instead of joining his regiment, which had returned to England, and was now quartered at York, he sent in his papers without telling his mother, or anybody else what he was doing, and would not reconsider his decision when asked to do so by his colonel. He told his mother one morning at breakfast, in quite a casual way, that he had left the army.

"Oh, Geoffrey!" she exclaimed, with a shocked look.

"I hope you are not sorry. I thought it would please you for me to be my own master, able to spend more of my life with you."

"Dear Geoffrey, I am very glad on that account; but I'm afraid it is a selfish gladness. It was better for you to have a profession. Everybody told me so years ago, when I was so grieved at your going into the army."

"That is a way everybody has of saying smooth things. Well, mother, I am no longer a soldier. India was pleasant enough—

there was a smack of adventure, a possibility of fighting—but I could not have endured garrison life in an English town. I would rather mope at home."

"Why should you mope, Geoff?"

"Yes, why? I am free to go east, west, north, or south. I suppose there need be no moping now."

"But you will be often at home, won't you, dear? Or else I shall be no gainer by your leaving the army."

"Yes, I will be here as often, and as much as—as I can bear it."

He had risen from the breakfast-table, and was walking up and down the room, with that light careless step of his which seemed in perfect harmony with his tall slim figure. He was very pale, and his eyes were brighter than usual, and there was a quick restlessness in the smile that flashed across his face now and again.

"Do I bore you so much, Geoffrey?" his mother asked, with a wounded look.

"You bore me! No, no, no! Oh, surely you know how the land lies. Surely this fever cannot have been eating up my heart and my strength all this time without your eyes seeing, and your heart sympathizing. You *must* know that I love her."

"I feared as much, my poor Geoffrey."

No name had been spoken; yet mother and son understood each other.

"You feared! Great God, why should it be a reason for fear? Here am I, young, rich, my own master—and here is she as free as she is fair—free to be my wife to-morrow, except for this tie which is no tie—a foolish engagement to a man she never loved."

"Has she told you that?"

"Not she. Her lips are locked by an overstrained sense of honour. She will marry a man for whom she doesn't care a straw. She will be miserable all her life, or at best she will have missed happiness, and on her deathbed she will boast to her parish priest, 'I have kept my word.' Poor pretty Puritan! She thinks it virtue to break my heart and grieve her own."

"You have told her of your love, Geoffrey?"

"Yes."

"That was dishonourable."

"No more than it was to love her. I am a lump of dishonour; I am made up of lies; but if she had an ounce of pluck, there need be no more falsehood. She has only to tell him the truth, the sad simple truth. 'I never loved you. I have let myself be persuaded into an engagement, but I never loved you.'"

"That would break Allan's heart."

"It would be bad to bear, no doubt, but not so bad as the gradual revelation that must come upon him in the years after marriage. She may be able to deceive him now—to delude him with the idea that she loves him; but how about the long winter evenings by their own fireside, and the dull nights when the rain is on the roof? A woman may hide her want of love before marriage, but by Heaven she can't hide it after. God help him when he finds that he has a victim, and not a wife."

"Poor Allan! But how do you know she does not care for him—or that she cares for you?"

"How do I know that I live and breathe, that this is I?" touching himself, with an impatient tap of those light restless fingers. "I know it. I have known it more or less from the time we played those duets—the dawn of knowledge and of love. To know each other was to love. We were born for each other. Allan, with his shadowy resemblance to me, was only my forerunner, like the man one sees in the street, the man who reminds one of a dear friend, half an hour or so before we meet that very friend. Allan taught her to like the type. She never loved him. In me she recognizes the individual, fated to love her and to be loved by her."

"Dear Geoffrey, this is mere guess-work."

"No! It is instinct, intuition, dead certainty. I tell you—once, twice, a thousand times, if you like—she loves me, and she doesn't love him. Tax her with it, pluck out the heart of her mystery. This hollow sham—this simulacrum of love must not go on to marriage. Talk to her, as woman to woman, as mother to daughter. I tell you it must not go on. It is driving me mad."

"I will do what I can. Poor Allan, so good, so true-hearted."

"Am I false-hearted or vile, mother? Why should Allan be all in all to you?"

"He is not all in all. You know you are the first, always the first in my heart; but I am very sorry for Allan. If what you tell me is true, he is doomed to be most unhappy. He is so fond of her. He has placed all his hopes of happiness upon his marriage—and they are to be married in little more than a month. It will be heartless to break it off."

"If it isn't broken off, there will be a tragedy. I will rush between them at the altar. The lying words shall not be spoken.

I would rather shoot him—or her—than that she should perjure herself, swear to love another while she loves only me!"

"Geoffrey, how do you know? How can you be sure——?"

"Our hands have touched; our eyes have met. That is enough."

He walked out of the window to the garden, and from the garden to the stables, where he ordered his dog-cart. His servant kept a portmanteau always ready packed. He left Discombe within an hour of that conversation with his mother, and he was on his way to London before noon. The first intimation of his departure which his mother received was a note which she found on the luncheon-table.

"I am off to the Hartz for a fortnight's tramp. Remember, something must be done to hinder this marriage. I shall return before the middle of August, and shall expect to find all settled.

"Address Poste Restante, Hartzburg."

CHAPTER XXII.

"WHO KNOWS WHY LOVE BEGINS?"

THE time was drawing near. The corn was cut and carried on many a broad sweep of hot chalky soil, and summer's branding sun had burnt up the thin grass on the wide bare down, where never shadow of tree or bush made a cool spot in the expanse of light and heat and dryness. The mysterious immemorial stones yonder on Salisbury Plain stood up against a background of cloudless blue; and every window of the cathedral in the valley winked and flashed in the sunshine. Only in the sober old close, and the venerable gardens of a bygone generation, within hedges that dead hands had planted, trees whose growth dead eyes had watched, was there coolness or shelter, or the gentle slumberous feeling of summer afternoon in its restful perfection.

Here, in an antique drawing-room, Mrs. Mornington and her niece were taking tea after a morning with tailor and dressmaker.

"There never was such a girl for not-caring-ness as this girl of mine," said Mrs. Mornington, with a vexed air. "If it had not been for me, I don't think she would have had a new frock in her trousseau, and as she is a very prim personage about *lingerie*,

and has a large stock of Parisian prettiness in that line, there would really have been nothing to buy."

"Rather a relief, I should think," laughed Mrs. Canon, who was giving them tea.

"A most delightful state of things," asserted Mrs. Sub-Dean, proud mother of half a dozen daughters, in which opinion agreed a county lady, also rich in daughters.

"Ah, you are all against me!" said Mrs. Mornington; "but there is a great pleasure in buying things, especially when one is spending somebody else's money."

"Poor papa," sighed Suzette. "My aunt forgets that he is not Crœsus."

"Look at that girl's wretched pale face!" cried Mrs. Mornington. "Would any one think that she was going to be married to a most estimable young man, and the best match in the neighbourhood—except one?"

At those two last words, Suzette's cheeks flamed crimson, and the feminine conclave looking at her felt she was being cruelly used by this strong minded aunt of hers.

"I don't think the nicest girls are ever very keen about their trousseau," said the county lady, with a furtive glance at a buxom freckled daughter, who had lately become engaged, and who had already begun to discuss house-linen and frocks, with a largeness of ideas that alarmed her parents.

"Yes; but there is a difference between caring too much and not caring at all. Suzette would be married in that white gingham she is wearing to-day, if I would let her."

"Pray don't tease people about my frocks, auntie. If you can't find something more interesting to talk about, we had better go away," said Suzette, with a pettishness which was quite unlike her; but it must be owned that to be made the object of a public attack in feminine convocation was somewhat exasperating.

Mrs. Mornington was not to be put down. She went on talking of frocks, though one of the daughters of the house carried Suzette off to the garden—an act of real Christian charity, if she had not spoilt her good work by beginning to talk of Suzette's lover.

"I can quite fancy your aunt must be rather boring sometimes," she said. "But *do* tell me about Mr. Carew. I thought him *so* nice the other day at the flower-show, when you introduced him to me."

"What can I tell you about him? You have seen him—and I am glad you thought him nice."

"Yes; but one wants to know more. One wants to know what he is like—from your point of view."

"But how could you see him from my point of view? That's impossible."

"True! A casual acquaintance could never see him as he appears to you—to whom he is all the world," said the Canon's daughter, who was young and romantic, having lived upon church music and Coventry Patmore's poetry.

"There's my aunt showing them patterns of my frocks!" exclaimed Suzette irritably, glancing in at the drawing-room, where Mrs. Mornington sat, the centre of a little group, handing scraps of stuff out of her reticule.

The scraps were being passed round and peered at and pulled about by everybody, with a meditative and admiring air. An African savage, seeing the group, would have supposed that some act of sortilege was being performed.

"It is rather an ordeal being married," said the Canon's daughter, thinking sadly of a certain undergraduate who was downhearted about his divinity exam., and upon whose achieving deacon's orders within a reasonable time depended the young lady's matrimonial prospects.

She sighed as she thought of the difference in worldly wealth between that well-meaning youth and Allan Carew; and yet here was the future Mrs. Carew pale and worried, and obviously discontented with her lot.

When those gowns had been ordered, Suzette felt as if it were another link forged in the iron chain which seemed to weigh heavier upon her every day of her life.

She had promised, and she must keep her promise; that was what she was continually saying to herself. Those words were woven into all her thoughts. Allan was so good, so true-hearted! Could she disappoint and grieve him? Could she be heartless, unkind, selfish—think of herself first and of him after—snatch at the happiness Fate offered to her, and leave him out in the cold? No, better that she should bear her lot—become his wife, live out her slow, melancholy days, his faithful servant and friend, honouring him and obeying him, doing all that woman can do for man, except loving him.

Those meteoric appearances of Geoffrey's had made life much harder for Suzette. She might have fought against her love for

him more successfully perhaps had he been always near; had she seen him almost daily, and become accustomed to his presence as a common incident in the daily routine; but to be told that he was in the far north of Scotland, yachting with a friend; and then to be startled by his voice at her shoulder, murmuring her name in Discombe Wood; and to turn round with nervous quickness to see him looking at her with his pale smile, like a ghost—or to be assured that he was salmon-fishing in Connemara, and to see him suddenly sauntering across the lawn in the July dusk, more ghost-like even than in the woods, as if face and form were a mere materialization which her own sad thoughts had conjured out of the twilight.

He would take very little trouble to explain his unlooked-for return. Scotland was too hot; the North Sea was like a vast sheet of red-hot iron, blown over by a south wind that was like the breath of a blast-furnace. Ireland was a place of bad inns and inexorable rain, and there were no fish, or none that he could catch. He had come home because life was weariness away from home. He feared that life meant weariness everywhere.

The days were hurrying by, and now Mrs. Mornington talked everlastingly of the wedding, or so it seemed to Suzette, who in these latter days tried to avoid her aunt as much as was consistent with civility, and fled from the Grove to Discombe as to a haven of peace. Mrs. Mornington loved to expatiate upon the coming event, to bewail her niece's indifferentism, to regret that there was to be no festivity worth speaking of, and to enlarge upon the advantages of Allan's position and surroundings, and Suzette's good fortune in having come to Matcham.

"Your father might have spent a thousand pounds on a London season, and not have done half so well for you," she said conclusively.

The General nodded assent.

Certainly, between them they had done wonderfully well for Suzette.

From this worldly wisdom the harassed girl fled to the quiet of Discombe, where the peaceful silence was only broken by the deep broad stream of sound from the organ, touched with ever-growing power by Mrs. Wornock. Suzette would steal softly into the music-room unannounced, and take her accustomed seat in the recess by the organ, and sit silently listening as long as Mrs. Wornock cared to play. Only when the last chord had died away did the two women touch hands and look at each other.

It was about a week after that wearying day in Salisbury when Suzette seated herself by the player in this silent way, and sat listening to a funeral march by Beethoven, with her head leaning on her hand, and not so much as a murmur of praise for music or performer stirring the thoughtful quiet of her lips. When the last melancholy notes, low down in the bass, had melted into silence, Mrs. Wornock looked up and saw Suzette's face bathed in tears—tears that streamed over the pallid cheeks unchecked.

Geoffrey's mother started up from the organ, and clasped the weeping girl to her breast.

"Poor child! poor child! He was right, then? You are not happy."

"Happy! I am miserable! I don't know what to do. I don't know what would be worst or wickedest. To disappoint him, or to marry him, not loving him!"

"No, no, no! you must not marry, not if you cannot love him. But are you sure of that, Susie? Are you sure you don't love him? He is so good, so worthy to be loved, as his father was—years ago. Why should you not love him?"

"Ah, who can tell?" sighed Suzette. "Who knows why love begins, or how love gets the mastery? I let myself be talked into thinking I loved him. I always liked him—liked his company—was grateful for his attentions, respected him for his fine nature, and then I let him persuade me that this was love; but it wasn't—it never was love. Friendship and liking are not love; and now that the fatal day draws near I know how wide a difference there is between love and liking."

"You must not marry him, Suzette. You know I would not willingly say one word that would tell against Allan Carew's happiness. I love him almost as dearly as I love my own son; but when I see you miserable—when I see Geoffrey utterly wretched, I can no longer keep silence. This marriage must be broken off."

"He will hate me; he will despise me. What can he think me?—false, fickle, unworthy of a good man's love."

"You must tell him the truth. It will be cruel, but not so cruel as to let him go on believing in you, thinking himself happy, living in a fool's paradise. Will you let me speak for you, Suzette?—let me do what your mother might have done had she been here to help you in your need?"

Suzette was speechless with tears, her face hidden on Mrs. Wornock's shoulder. The door was opened at this moment, and a servant announced Mr. Carew.

Allan had approached the group by the organ before either Mrs. Wornock or Suzette could hide her agitation. Their tears, the way in which they clung to each other, told of some over-mastering grief.

"Good God! what is the matter? What has happened?" he exclaimed.

"Nothing has happened, Allan; yet there is sorrow for all of us—sorrow that has been coming upon us, though some of us did not know it. Suzette, may I tell him—now, this moment?"

"May you tell me? Tell me what?" questioned Allan. "Suzette, speak to me—you—you—no one else!"

Fear, indignation, despair were in his tone. He caught hold of Suzette's arm, and drew her towards him, looking searchingly at the pale, tear-stained face; but she shrank from his grasp, and sank on her knees at his feet.

"It is my miserable secret—that must be told at last. I have tried—I have hoped—I honour—I respect you—Allan. But our hearts are not our own; we cannot guide or govern their impulses. My heart is weighed down with shame and misery, but it is empty of love. I cannot love you as your wife should. If I keep my word, I shall be a miserable woman."

"You shall not be that," he said sternly—"not to make me the happiest man in creation. But don't you think," with chilling deliberation, "this tragedy might have been acted a little earlier? It seems to me that you have kept your secret over carefully."

"I have been weak, Allan, hopelessly, miserably weak-minded. I tried to do what was best. I did not want to disappoint you——"

"Disappoint me? Why, you have fooled me from the first! Disappoint me? Why, I have built the whole fabric of my future life upon this rotten foundation! I was to be happy because of your love; my days and years were to flow sweetly by in a paradise of domestic peace, blest by your love. And all the time there was no such thing. You did not love me; you had never loved me; you were only trying to love me; and the hopelessness of the endeavour is brought home to you to-day—three weeks before our wedding-day. Suzette, Suzette, never was woman's cruelty crueller than this of yours."

She was in floods of tears at his feet, her head drooping till her face almost touched the ground. He left her kneeling there, and rushed away to the garden to hide his own tears—the tears of which his manhood was ashamed, the passionate sobs, the wild

hysterieal weeping of the sex that seldom weeps. He found a shelter and a hiding-plaee in an angle of the garden, where there was a side walk shut in by elose-eropped eypress walls, and here Mrs. Wornock found him presently, sitting on a marble beneh, with his elbows on his knees, his faee hidden in his hands.

She seated herself at his side, and laid her hand gently on his.

"Allan, dear Allan, I am so sorry for you," she said softly.

"I am very sorry for myself. I don't seem to need anybody's pity. I think I can do all the grieving."

"Ah, that is the worst of it. Nobody's sympathy can help you."

"Not yours," he answered almost savagely; "for, at heart, you must be glad. My dismissal makes room for some one else—somo one whose interests are dearer to you than mine could ever be."

"There is no one nearer or dearer to me than you, Allan—no one—not even my own son. You have been to me as a son—the son of the man I fondly loved, whose faee I was to look upon only onee—onee after those long years in whieh we were parted. I have loved you as a part of my youth, the living memory of my lost love. Ah, my dear, I had to learn the lesson of self-surrender when I was younger than you. I loved him with all my heart and mind, and I gave him up."

"You did wrong to give him up. He himself said so. But there is no parallel between the two eases. This girl has let me believe in her. I have lived for a year in this sweet delusion—a bliss no more real than the happiness of a dream. She would have loved me; she would have married me; all would have been well for us but for your son. When he came, my ehanee was blighted. He has eharms of mind and manner which I have not—like me, they say, but ten times handsomer. He ean speak to her with a language that I have not. Oh, those singing notes on the violin—that long-drawn lingering sweep of the bow, like the cry of a spirit in paradiso —an angelie voiee telling of love etherial—love released from elay —those tears whieh seemed to tremble on the strings—that loud, sudden sob of passionate pain, whieh eame like a short, sharp amen to the prayer of love. I eould understand that language better than he thought. He stole her love from me—set himself deliberately to rob me of my life's happiness."

"It is cruel to say that, Allan. He is incapable of treachery, of deliberate wrong-doing. He is a ereature of impulse."

"Meaning a ereature with whom self is the only god. And in one of his impulses he told Suzette of his love, even in plainer

words than his Stradivarius could tell the story; and from that hour her heart was false to me. I saw the change in her when I came back—after my father's death."

"You are unjust to him, Allan, in your grief and anger. Whatever his feelings may have been, he has fought against them. He has made himself almost an exile from this house."

"He has been biding his time, no doubt; and now that I have had the *coup de grace* he will come back."

CHAPTER XXIII.

"THAT WAY MADNESS LIES."

It would have taken a very respectable earthquake to have made as much sensation in a rural neighbourhood as was made in the village and neighbourhood of Matcham by the cancelment of Allan Carew's engagement to General Vincent's daughter. The fact that no visitors had been bidden to the wedding seemed to make no difference in the rapid dissemination of the news. People from twenty miles round had been interested, people from twenty miles round had come up to be taxed, and had sent pepper-pots and hair-brushes, paper-knives and scent-bottles, fans and candlesticks—all of which were now returned to the givers in the very tissue paper and cardboard boxes in which they had been sent from shops or stores, accompanied by a formal little note of apology. The marriage had been deferred indefinitely; and, at his daughter's request, General Vincent begged to return the gifts, with sincere thanks for the kindly feeling which had prompted, etc.

"It will do for some one else!"

That was the almost inevitable exclamation when the tissue paper was unfolded and the gift appeared, untarnished and undamaged by the double transit. Then followed speculations as to the meaning of those words, "deferred indefinitely."

"Indefinitely means never," pronounced Mrs. Roebuck; "there's no doubt upon that point. He has jilted her. I thought he would begin to look about him after his father's death. I dare say he will have a house in town next season—a *pied à terre* near Park Lane—and go into society, instead of vegetating among these Bœotians. He must feel himself thrown away in such a hole."

"I thought he was devoted to Miss Vincent."

"Nonsense! How could any man be devoted to an insignificant Frenchified chit without style or *savoir faire?*"

"She has a pretty, piquant little face," murmured Mr. Roebuck meekly, not liking to be enthusiastic about beauty which was the very opposite of his wife's Roman-nosed and flaxen-haired style.

Upon Mrs. Mornington the blow fell far more heavily than on Suzette's father, who was very glad to keep his daughter at home, albeit regretful that she should have treated a faithful lover so scurvily.

"If the poor child did not know her own mind at the beginning, it's a blessed thing she found out her mistake before it was too late," pleaded the General to his irate sister.

"It is too late—too late for respectability—too late for common humanity. To lead a young man on for over a year, almost to the steps of the altar, and then to throw him off. It is simply shameful! To make a fool of him and herself before the whole neighbourhood—to belittle herself as much as she has belittled him. No doubt all the women will say that *he* has jilted *her*."

"Let them. That cannot hurt her."

"But it can hurt me, her aunt. I feel inclined to slap my most intimate friends when they ask me leading questions, evidently longing to hear that Allan has acted badly. And when I assure them that my niece is alone to blame, I can see in their faces that they don't, or won't, believe me. And why should they believe me? Could any girl, not an idiot, throw over such a match as Allan has become since his father's death?"

"I hope you don't mean to say that my girl is an idiot?"

"I say that she has acted like an idiot in this affair."

"And I say that she has acted like an honest woman."

"I shall never be able to look Lady Emily Carew in the face again."

"Don't be alarmed about Lady Emily. She will be no more sorry to keep her son to herself than I am to keep my daughter."

"She won't have him long. He'll be going off and marrying some horrid end-of-the-century girl in a fit of pique."

"I don't believe he is such a fool."

Matcham might talk its loudest, and dispute almost to blows, as to which was the jilter and which the jilted. The principal performers in the tragedy were well out of ear-shot—Allan at Vendyke with Lady Emily, Suzette at Bournemouth with an old convent friend and her invalid mother, people who had no connection with Matcham, and in whose society the girl could not be reminded of

her own wrong-doing. The invitation to the villa at Branksome had been repeated very often; and on a renewal of it arriving just after that painful scene at Discombe, Suzette had written promptly to accept.

"If you don't mind my coming to you out of spirits and altogether troubled in mind, *chérie*," she wrote; and the girl, who was a very quiet piece of amiability, and who had worshipped her livelier school-fellow, replied delightedly, "Your low spirits must be brighter than other people's gaiety. Come, and let the sea and the downs console you. Bournemouth is lovely in September. Mother has given me the charmingest pony, and I have been carefully taught by our old coachman, who is a whip in a thousand, so you need not be afraid to trust yourself beside me."

"Except for father's sake, it might be a good thing if she were to throw me out of her cart and kill me on the spot," mused Suzette, as she sat listlessly watching her maid packing her trunk.

Among the frocks, there was one of the Salisbury tailor's confections, a frock which was to have been worn by Mrs. Allan Carew, and Suzette felt that she would sink with shame when she put it on.

"I ought to be prosecuted for obtaining goods under false pretences," she thought.

Geoffrey Wornock found a telegram waiting for him at the little post-office at Hartzburg, and the mere outward casing of that message set his heart beating furiously. There must be news of his love in it, news good or bad.

"I will not live through her wedding-day, if she marries him," he told himself.

The telegram was from his mother.

"The marriage is broken off with much sorrow on both sides."

"That's nonsense. On her part there can be no sorrow—only relief of mind, only joy, the prospect of a blissful union, a life without a cloud. Thank God, thank God, thank God! I never felt there was a God till now. Now I believe in Him—now I will lift up my heart to Him, in nightly and daily prayer, as Adam did by the side of Eve. Oh, thank God, the barrier is removed, and she can be mine! My own dear love—heart of my heart—life of my life!"

He carried a fiddle among his scanty luggage, not the treasured inimitable Stradivarius, but a much-cherished little Amati; and

by-and-by, having eaten some hurried scraps by way of dinner, he took the violin out of its case and went out to a little garden at the back of the inn, and in a vine-clad berceau gave himself up to impassioned utterance of the love that overflowed his heart. Music, and music only, could speak for him—music was the interpreter of all his highest thoughts. The stolid beer-drinkers came out of their smoke-darkened parlour to hear him, and sat silent and unseen behind an intervening screen of greenery, and listened and approved.

"Ach, what for a fiddler! How he can play! Whole heaven-like. Not true, my friend?"

He played and played, walking about under the vine-curtain—played till the pale grey evening shadows darkened to purplest night, and the stars looked through the leafy roof of that rustic tunnel. He was playing to her; to her, his far-away love; to Suzette in England. He was pouring out his soul's desire to her, a hymn of sweet content, and he almost fancied that she could hear him. There must be some mystical medium by which such sounds can travel from being to being, where love attunes two souls in unison—some process now hidden from the dull mind of average man, as the electric telegraph was half a century ago.

This is how a lover dreams in the summer gloaming, in a garden on the slope of a pine-clad hill, with loftier heights beyond, shadowy and dark against the deep blue of that infinite sky where the stars are shining aloof and incomprehensible, in remoteness that fills mortality with despair.

She was free! That was Geoffrey's one thought in every hour and almost every minute of his breathless journey from Hartzburg to Discombe. She was free; and for her to be free meant that she was to be his. He imagined no opposition upon her side when once her engagement to Allan had been broken. She had been bound by that tie, and that only. His impetuous, passionate nature, self-loving and concentrative as the temper of a child, could conceive no restraining influence, nothing that could prevent her heart answering his, her hand yielding to his, and a marriage as speedy as law and Church would allow.

They could be married ever so quietly—in London—where no curious eyes could watch, no gossiping tongues criticise—married—made for ever one; and then away to mountain and lake, to Pallanza, Lugano, Bellaggio, anywhere betwixt hill and water, to a life lovelier than his fairest dreams.

No man journeying with a passionate heart ever found rail or

boat quick enough, and Geoffrey, always impatient, chafed at every stage of the journey, and complained as bitterly as if he had been travelling at the expensive crawl in which a Horace Walpole or a Beckford was content to accomplish that restricted round which our ancestors called the "grand tour." Nothing slower than a balloon would have satisfied Geoffrey's eager soul. And he would rather have accepted balloon transit, with all its hazards, and run the risk of being landed in a Carinthian valley or a Norwegian fjord, than endure the harassing delay at dusty railway stations or the slowness of the channel boat.

He telegraphed to his mother from Brussels, and again from Dover; so there was a cart waiting for him at the station with one of the fastest horses in the stable, but, unfortunately, one of the stupidest grooms, who could furnish him with no information upon any subject.

Was all well at home? His mistress well?

The groom believed so.

"Was Miss Vincent well?"

The groom had heard nothing to the contrary; but he had not seen Miss Vincent lately.

No particular inference was to be drawn from this statement of the groom's, since Suzette's visits were not made to the stableyard.

There was no one at Discombe to do stable-parade and to insist upon horses being stripped and trotted up and down for the edification of a visitor whose utmost knowledge of a horse might be that it is a beast with four legs—mane and tail understood, though not always existent.

Geoffrey rattled his old hunter along at a pace that made the cart sway like an outrigger in the wake of a steamer, and he alighted at the Manor House at least a quarter of an hour before a reasonable being would have got himself there.

It was late in the evening, and his mother was sitting alone in the dimly lighted music-room. The piano was shut—a bad sign; for when Suzette was there the piano was hardly ever idle.

"Well, mother dear, so glad to be home again," said Geoffrey, with an affectionate hug, but with eyes that were looking over his mother's head into space for another presence, even while he gave her that filial embrace.

"And I am so glad to have you, Geoffrey; and I hope now this restless spirit will be content to stay."

"*C'est selon.* Where's Suzette?"

"At Bournemouth, with an old school-fellow."

"Why didn't you wire her address, and then I could have gone straight to her?"

"My dear Geoffrey, what are you thinking of?"

"Of Suzette—of my dear love—of my wife that is to be!"

"My dear boy, you cannot go to her. You must not ask her to marry you while this cancelled engagement is a new thing. I should think her a horrid girl if she would listen to you—for ever so long."

"Do you mean for a week—or a fortnight?"

"For a long, long time, Geoffrey—long enough for Allan's wounded heart to recover."

"Upon my soul, mother, that is too good a joke! Is my mother, the most romantic and unconventional of women, preaching the eighteenpenny gospel of middle-class etiquette?"

"It is no question of conventionality. My affection for Allan is only second to my love for you, and I cannot bear to think of his being wounded and humiliated, as he must be if Suzette were to accept you directly after having jilted him."

"And you would have Suzette sit beside the tomb of Allan's hopes for a year or so while I eat my heart out—banquet on joys deferred—sicken and die, perhaps, with that slow torture of waiting. Mother, you don't know what love is—love in the heart of a man. If she had married Allan, I should have shot myself on her wedding-day. That was written in my book of fate. If she won't marry me; if she play fast and loose, blow hot, blow cold; if she won't look in my eyes and say honestly, 'I love you,' and 'I am yours,' I can't answer for myself—I fear there will be a tragedy. You know there is something here"—touching his forehead—"which loses itself in a whirl of fiery confusion when this"—touching his heart—"is too sorely tried."

"Geoffrey, my dearest! oh, Geoffrey, you agonize me when you talk like that! I think—yes, I believe that Suzette loves you; but she is sensitive, tender-hearted—all that is womanly and good. You must give her time to recover from the shock of parting with Allan, whom she sincerely esteems, and whose sorrow is her sorrow."

"I will see her to-morrow. I cannot live without seeing her. Why, every mile of pine-forest through which I came seemed three, every mile of dusty Belgian flatness seemed seven, to my hot impatience. I must see her, hear her, hold her hand in mine; and she shall do what she likes with the poor rag of life which will be left when I have lived an hour with her."

CHAPTER XXIV.

ROMAN AND SABINE.

GEOFFREY was not to be baulked of his purpose. He sat till long after midnight in the music-room with his mother—sat or roamed about in the ample spaces of that fine apartment, talking in his own wild way, with that restless, fitful romanticism which had marked him from childhood, from the dim hours, so vaguely remembered and so sadly sweet in his memory, when he had sat on the floor with his head leaning against the soft silken folds of her gown, and had been moved to tears by her playing. There were simple turns of melody, almost automatic phrases of Mozart's, which recalled the vague heartache of those childish hours; an idea of music so interwoven with that other idea of summer twilight in a spacious, shadowy room, that it startled him to hear one of those familiar movements in the broad glare of day, as if daylight and *that* music were irreconcilable.

No arguments of his mother's could shake his purpose.

"I will see her and talk with her. She alone shall be the judge of what is right. Perhaps when I am sure of her I may be able to teach myself patience. But I must be sure of her love."

He was at Bournemouth by the first train that would carry him there, and it was still early when he went roaming out towards Branksome and the borderland of Dorset. To walk suited better with his impatience than to be driven by a possibly stupid flyman, and to have the fly pulled up every five minutes for the stupid flyman to interrogate a—probably—more stupid pedestrian, who would inevitably prove a stranger in these parts, as if the inhabitants never walked abroad.

No, he would find Rosenkrantz, Mrs. Tolmash's villa, for himself. He had been told it was near Branksome Chine.

Swift of foot and keen of apprehension, he succeeded in less time than any flyman would have done. Yes, this was the villa—red-brick, gabled, curtained with virginia creeper from chimneys downwards; virginia creeper not yet touched by autumn's ruddy fingers; and with roses enough in the well-kept garden to justify the name which fancy had given. He opened the light iron gate and went into the garden; a somewhat spacious garden. She was there, perhaps. At any rate, he would explore before confronting servant, drawing-room, and unknown lady of the house. The

garden was so pretty, and the morning was so fine, that, if within the precincts, surely she would be in the garden.

He went boldly round the house by a shrubberied walk, and saw a fine lawn on a breezy height above the Chine, facing the sunlit sea and the wooded dip that went down to golden sands. The standard rose-trees were blown about in the fresh morning air, dropping a rain of pink and yellow on the smooth short turf. He saw the sea westward—sapphire blue—through an arch of reddest roses, and beyond that archway, close to the edge of the cliff, as it seemed in the perspective, there was a bench with a red and white awning, and sitting under that awning a figure in a white frock, a slender waist, a graceful throat, a small dark head, which he would have known from a thousand girlish heads and throats and waists—for him the girl of girls.

He knew that restless foot, lightly tapping the grass as she looked seaward. Was there not weariness of life, rebellion against fate, in that quick movement of the slender foot? She was waiting for happiness and for him.

He ran to her, sat down by her side, had taken both her hands in his, before she could utter so much as a cry of surprise.

"My darling, my darling!" he murmured; "now and for ever my own!"

She snatched her hands away and started to her feet indignantly. Anger flashed in the dark eyes and flushed the pale olive cheeks. And then her frown changed to an ironical smile, and she stood looking at him almost contemptuously.

"I think you forget, Mr. Wornock, that it is a long time since the Romans ran away with the Sabines."

"You mean that I am too impetuous."

"I mean that you are too absurd."

"Is it absurd to love the sweetest woman in the world—the prettiest, the most enchanting? Suzette, I tore back from the Hartz Mountains because I was told you were free—free to wed the man who loves you with all the passion of his soul. When I told you of my love months ago, you were bound to another man, you were resolutely bent upon keeping your promise to him. I had no option but to withdraw, to fight my battle, and try to live without you. I did try, Suzette. I left the ground clear for my rival. I was self-banished from my own home."

"You need not have been banished. I could have kept away from Discombe."

"That would have distressed my mother, whose happiness depends on your society, Suzette. You know how she loves you. To see you my wife will make her very happy. She has taken you to her heart as a daughter."

"Not so much as she has taken Allan Carew to her heart. It was for his sake she liked me. I could see when we parted that it was of Allan she thought; it was for him she was sorry. I don't think she will ever forgive me for making Allan unhappy."

"Not if her only son's happiness is bought with that price. Suzette, why do you keep me at arm's length—now, when there is nothing to part us; now, while I know that you love me?"

"You have no right to say that. If you know it, you know more than I know myself."

"Suzette, Suzette, do you deny your love?"

She was crying, with her hands over her averted face. He tried to draw those hands away, eager to look into her eyes. He would not believe mere words. Only in her eyes could he read the truth.

"I deny your right to question me now, while my heart is aching for Allan—Allan whom I like and respect more than any man living. He is the best friend I have in the world, after my father. He ever will be my cherished and trusted friend. If in some great unhappiness I needed any other friend than my father—badly, wickedly as I have behaved to him—it is to Allan I would go for help."

"What, not to me?"

"To you! No more than I would appeal to a whirlwind."

"You think me so unreasonable a creature."

"Yes, unreasonable! It is unreasonable in you to come here to-day. You must know that I am sorry for having behaved so badly—deeply sorry for Allan's disappointment."

"I begin to think it a pity you disappointed him, if nobody is to profit by your release. Oh, forgive me, forgive me! I should have killed myself if you had persisted. At least you have saved a life. I hope you are glad of that."

"I cannot talk to you while you are so foolish."

"Is it foolish to tell you the truth? I bare my heart to you—to the woman I want for my wife. I am a creature full of faults; but for you I could become anything. I would be as wax, and you should mould me into whatever image you would. Oh, Suzette, is not love enough? Is it not enough for any woman to be loved as I love you?"

"You cannot love me better than Allan did, though he never talked as wildly as you."

"Allan! It is not in his nature to love or to suffer as I do. He was not born under the same burning star. All the forces of nature were at war when I was born, Suzette. My Swiss nurse told me of the tempest that was lashing the lake and roaring over the wilderness of peaks and crags when I came into the world, with something of that storm in my heart and brain. Be my good genius, Suzette. Save me from my darker, stormier self. Make and mould me into an amiable, order-loving English gentleman. I am your slave. You have but to order me and I shall submit as meekly as the trained dog who lies down at his mistress's feet and shams the stillness of death. Tell me to fetch and carry; tell me to die. I will do your bidding like that dog."

She gave a troubled sigh and looked at him, pale and perplexed, in deep distress. His pleading moved her as no words of Allan's had ever done, and yet there was more of fear than of love in the emotion that he awakened.

"I have only one thing in the world to ask of you," she said, in a low, agitated voice. "I ask you to leave me to myself. I came here, almost among strangers, in order that I might be calm and quiet, and away from the associations of the past year. You must forgive me, Mr. Wornock, if I say that it was cruel of you to follow me here."

"Cruel for passionate love to follow the beloved! Mr. Wornock, too! How formal! Suzette, if you do not love me, if I am nothing to you, why did you jilt Carew?"

"I asked him to release me because I felt I did not love him well enough to be his wife.'

"Only that?"

'Only that. As time went on, I felt more and more acutely that I could not give him love for love."

"And you cared for no one else?—there was no other reason?" he insisted, trying to take her hand.

"I have hardly asked myself that question; and I will not be questioned by you."

She rose and moved away, he following..

"Mr. Wornock, I am going into the house. I beg you not to persecute me. It was persecution to come here to-day."

"Give me hope. I cannot leave you without hope."

"I can say nothing more than I have said. My heart is sore for Allan. Allan is first in my thoughts, and must be for a long time. I hate myself for having behaved so badly to him."

"And what of your behaviour to me? How cold! how cruel!"

"Oh, thank Heaven, here come Mrs. Tolmash and her daughter. Now you *must* go."

Geoffrey looked round and saw a middle-aged lady in a chair being wheeled across the lawn, a girl in a pink frock pushing her chair.

He gave Suzette a despairing look, picked up his hat from the grass, and walked quickly away. He was in no mood to make the acquaintance of the pink frock or the lady in the chair, though that plump, benevolent person, with neat little gray curls clustering round a fair forehead, looked quite capable of asking him to luncheon.

He walked back to the nearest station, angry beyond measure, and paced the platform for an hour, waiting for the train for Eastleigh, and with half a mind to throw himself under the first express that came shrieking by. Yet that were basest surrender.

"She is possessed by a devil of obstinacy," he told himself. "But the stronger devil within me shall master her."

While the more fiery and arrogant of Suzette's lovers was raging against her coldness, resolved to bear down all opposing forces, to ride roughshod over every obstacle, her gentler and more conscientious lover was hiding his grief in the quiet of that level and unromantic land on which his eyes had first opened. No tempest had raged when Allan was born. He had entered life amidst no grandeurs of mountain and glacier, arrested avalanche and flashing torrent. An English home—English to intensity—had been his cradle; a mild, even-tempered mother, a father in whom a gentle melancholy was the prevailing characteristic. Growing up under such home-influences, Allan Carew had something of womanly gentleness interwoven with the strong fibre of a fine manly nature. He had the womanly capacity to suffer in silence, to submit to Fate, and to take a very humble place at the banquet of life.

Well, he was not destined to be happy. She had never loved him—never. He had won her by sheer persistency; he had imposed upon her yielding nature, upon the amiability which makes it so hard for some women to say no. She had always been friendly and kind and sweet, but the signs and tokens of passionate love had been wanting. If she would have been content to marry him upon those friendly terms, content to forego the glamour of romantic love, all might have been well. Love would have followed marriage in the quiet years of a wedded life. The watchful kindnesses of an adoring husband must have won her heart.

Yes, but for Geoffrey Wornock's appearance on the scene, all might have been well. Suzette would have married Allan, and the years would have made liking love. Geoffrey's was the fatal influence. Contrast with that fiery nature had made Allan seem a dullard.

This is what the forsaken lover told himself as he roamed about the autumn fields, the fertile levels, where all the soil he trod on was his own, and had belonged to his ancestors when the clank of armed feet was still a common thing in the land, and a stout Suffolk pad was your swiftest mode of travel. The shooting had begun, and the houses of Suffolk were full of guests, and the squires of Suffolk had mustered their guns, and were doing their best to beat the record of last year and all the years that were gone. But Allan had no heart for so much as a morning tramp across the stubble. The flavour and the freshness were gone out of life. He gave his shooting to a neighbour, an old friend of his father's, while his own days were dawdled away in the library, or spent in long walks by stream and mill-race, pine-wood and common, in any direction that offered the best chance of solitude.

He wrote to Suzette, with grave kindness, apologizing for his angry vehemence in the hour of their parting. He expatiated sorrowfully upon that which might have been.

"I think I must have known all along that you had no romantic love for me," he wrote; "but I would have been more than content to have your liking in exchange for my passionate love. I should not have thought myself a loser had you put the case in the plainest words. 'You idolize me, and I—well—I think you an estimable young man, and I have no objection to be your idol, accepting your devotion, and giving you a sisterly regard in exchange.' There are men who would think that a bad bargain; but I am not made of such proud stuff. Your friendship would have been more precious to me than any other woman's love; and I should have been happy, infinitely happy, could I have won you on those terms.

"But it was not to be—and now my heart turns cold every time the post-bag is opened, lest it should hold the letter that will tell me Geoffrey Wornock has won the prize that I have lost. Such things must be, Suzette. They are happening every day, and hearts are breaking, quietly. May you be happy—my dear lost love—whatever I may be."

Much as he might desire solitude, it was impossible for Allan to escape his fellow-man through the month of September in such a happy shooting-ground as that in which his property lay. In that

part of Suffolk people knew of hunting as a barbarous form of sport somewhat affected in the midlands, and a fox was considered a beast of prey. The guns had it all their own way in those woods which Allan's great-grandfather had planted, and over the turnips which Allan's tenants had sown. Among the shooters who were profiting by his hospitality it was inevitable that he should meet some one he knew; and that some one happened to be a man with whom he had been on the friendliest terms five years before during a big shoot in the neighbourhood.

They met at a dinner at the house of the jovial squire to whom Allan had given his shooting—a five-mile drive from Fendyke. Lady Emily had persuaded her son to accept the invitation.

His father had been dead six months. Though she, the widow, would go nowhere, it might seem churlish in the son to hold himself aloof from old friends.

"And you don't want to be wearing the willow for that shallow-hearted girl, I hope," added Lady Emily, who was very angry with Suzette.

No, he did not want to wear the willow, to pose as a victim, so he accepted Mr. Meadowbank's invitation.

It was to be only a friendly dinner, only the house party; and among the house party Allan found his old acquaintance, Cecil Patrington, a man who had spent the best years of his life in Africa, and had won renown among sportsmen as a hunter of big game, a weather-beaten athlete, brawny, strong of limb, with bronzed forehead and copper-coloured neck.

"I think you were just back from Bechuana Land when we last met," said Allan, in the unreserve of Squire Meadowbank's luxurious smoke-room, "and you were going back to the Cape when the shooting was over. Have you been in Africa ever since?"

"Yes, I have been moving about most of the time, here and there, mostly in Central South Africa, between Brazzaville and Tabora, now on one side of the lake, now on the other?"

"Which lake?"

"Tanganyika. It's a delightful district, only it's getting a deuced deal too well known. Burton was a glorious fellow, and he had a glorious career. No man can ever enjoy life in Africa like that. There are steamers on the lake now, and one meets babies in perambulators, genuine British babies!" with a profound sigh.

"I have looked for a record of your exploits at the Geographical."

"Oh, I don't go in for that kind of thing, you see. I read a

paper once, and it didn't pay. I am not a literary cove like Burton, and I haven't the gift of the gab like Stanley—who is a literary cove, too, by the way. I ain't a scientific explorer. I don't care a hang what becomes of the water, don't you know. I like the lakes for their own sake—and the niggers for their own sake—and the picturesqueness of it all, and the variety, and the danger of it all. If I discovered a new lake or an unknown forest, I should keep the secret to myself. That's my view of Africa. I ain't a geographer. I ain't a missionary. I ain't a trader. I like Africa because it's jolly, and because there ain't any other place in the world worth living in to the man who has once been there."

"Shall you ever go again?"

"Shall I ever?" Mr. Patrington laughed at the question. "I sail for Zanzibar next November."

"Do you?" said Allan. "I should like to go with you?"

"Why not?" asked Mr. Patrington.

CHAPTER XXV.

"IF SHE BE NOT FAIR TO ME."

GEOFFREY WORNOCK went back to Discombe, and his mother read failure and mortification in his gloomy countenance; but he vouchsafed no confidence. He was not sullen or unkind. He lived; and that was about as much as could be said of him. The fiddles, which were to him as cherished friends, lay mute in their cases. He seemed to regard that spacious music-room with its lofty ceiling and noble capacity for sound, as the captive lion regards his cage—a place in which to roam about, and pace to and fro, restless, miserable, unsatisfied. He did not complain, and his mother dared not attempt to console. Once she pressed his hand and whispered "patience;" but he only shook his head fretfully, and walked out of the room.

"Patience! yes," he muttered to himself. "I could be patient, as patient as Jacob when he waited for Rachel—if I were sure she loved me. But I have begun to doubt even that. Oh, if she knew what love meant, she would have rushed into my arms. She would have swooned upon my breast in the shock of that meeting; but she sat prim and quiet, only a little pale and tearful, while I was shaken by a tempest of passion. She is capable of no more than

a schoolgirl's love—held in check by the pettiest restraints of good manners and the world's opinion—and she has hardly decided whether that feeble flame burns for me or for Allan."

And then he began to preach to himself the sermon which almost every slighted swain has preached since the world began. What was this woman that he should die of heart-ache for her? Was she so much fairer than other women whom he might have for the wooing? No, again and again, no. He could conjure fairer faces out of the past—faces he had gazed at and praised, and which had left him cold. She was not as handsome as Miss Simpson, at Simla, last year—that Miss Simpson who had thrown herself at his head—or as Miss Brown at Naini Tal, General Brown's daughter, who looked liked a houri, and who waltzed like a thing of air, imparting buoyancy and grace to the lumpiest of partners. He had not cared a straw for Miss Brown, even although the General had hinted to him, in the after-dinner freedom of the mess-room, that Miss Brown had an exalted opinion of him. No, he had cared for neither of these girls, though either might have been his for the asking. Perhaps that was why he did not care. He was madly in love with Suzette, whom he had known only as another man's betrothed. Suzette represented the unattainable; and for Suzette he could die.

He hardly left the bounds of Discombe during those bright autumnal days, when the music of the hounds was loud over field and down. He had dissevered himself from most of the friends of his manhood by leaving the army; and in Matcham he had only acquaintance. From these he kept scrupulously aloof. One Matcham person, however, he could not escape. Mrs. Mornington surprised him in the music-room with his mother one afternoon, and instead of running away, as he would have done from any one else, he stayed and handed tea-cups with supreme amiability.

He knew she would talk of Suzette. That was inevitable. She had scarcely settled herself in a comfortable armchair when she began.

"Well, Mrs. Wornock, have you seen anything more of this niece of mine?"

Of course there could be only one niece in question.

"No, indeed. She has not come back from Bournemouth, has she?"

"Oh yes, she has. She has come and gone. I made sure she would pay you a visit. You and she were always so thick. I believe she is fonder of you than she is of me."

Geoffrey began to walk about the room—as softly as the parquetted floor would allow—listening intently. Eager as he was to hear, he could not sit still while Suzette was being discussed.

Mrs. Wornock murmured a gentle negative.

"Oh, but she is, you know. There is that," said Mrs. Mornington, pointing to the organ, "and that," pointing to the piano, "and your son is a fiddler. You are music mad, all of you. Suzette took to practising five hours a day. It was Chopin, Rubinstein, Beethoven, and Mendelssohn all day long. She looks upon me as an outsider, because I don't appreciate classical music. I wonder she didn't run over to see you."

"Has she gone back to Bournemouth?"

"Not she. My foolish brother took fright about her because she was looking pale and worried when she came home; so he whisked her off to London, took her to a doctor in Mayfair, who said Schwalbach; and to Schwalbach they are gone, and I believe, after a course of iron at Schwalbach—where they will meet no civilized beings at this time of year—they are to winter on the Riviera, and a pretty penny these whims and fancies will cost her father. I am glad I have no daughters. Poor Allan! such a fine, honest-hearted young man! She ought to have thanked God for such a sweetheart. I dare say, if he had been a reprobate and a bankrupt, she would have offered to go through fire and water for him."

Geoffrey walked out at the open window which afforded such a ready escape.

She was gone. Heartless, selfish girl! Gone without a word of farewell, without a whisper of hope.

Allan returned to Matcham a few days after Mrs. Mornington's appearance at Discombe, and in spite of his dark doubts about Geoffrey, his first visit was to Mrs. Wornock.

She was shocked at the change in him. He was pale, and thin, and serious looking, and, but for his grey-tweed suit, might have been mistaken for a city parson with a populous hungry parish.

She talked to him about Lady Emily and the farm. Had he been shooting? Were there many birds this year? She talked of the most frivolous things in order to ward off painful subjects. But he himself spoke of Suzette.

"She has gone away, I am told, for the whole winter. Marsh House is shut up. I never knew what a bright home-like house it

was till I saw it this morning, with the shutters shut, and the gates padlocked. There was not even a dog to bark at me. She has gone far afield; but I am going a good deal farther."

And then he told her with a certain excitement of his meeting with Cecil Patrington, and his approaching departure for Zanzibar.

"It was the luckiest thing in the world for me," he said. "I had not the least idea what to do with myself, or where to go, to get out of myself. The little I have seen of the Continent rather bored me—picture-gallery, cathedral, *table-d'hôte*, a theatre, invariably shut up, a river, reported delightful when navigable, but not navigable at the time being. The same thing, and the same thing—not very interesting to a man who can't reckon the age of a cathedral to within a century or two—over and over again. But this will be new, this will mean excitement. I shall feel as if I were born again. The wonder will be—to myself, at least—that I don't come home black."

"And you think you will find consolation—in Africa?"

"I hope to find forgetfulness."

"Poor Allan! Poor Geoffrey! It is a hard thing that you should both suffer."

"Mr. Wornock's sufferings will soon be over, I take it. Rapture and not suffering will be the dominant in the scale of his life. He will have everything his own way when I am gone."

"I don't think he will. He has not confided his secrets to me, but I believe he has offered himself to her, since her engagement was broken, and has been rejected."

"He will offer himself again and will be accepted. There are conventionalities to be observed. Miss Vincent would not like people to say that she transferred her affections from lover to lover with hardly a week's interval."

"I only know that my son is very unhappy, Allan."

"So is a spoilt child when he can't have the moon. Your son will get the moon all in good time—only he will have to wait for it, and spoilt children don't like waiting."

"How bitterly you speak of him, Allan. I hope you are not going to be ill friends."

"Why should we be ill friends? It is not his fault that she has thrown me over—at the eleventh hour. It is only his good fortune to be more attractive than I am. It was the contrast with his brilliancy that showed her my dulness. He has the magnetism which I have not—genius, perhaps, or at least the air and sugges-

tion of genius. One hardly knows what constitutes the real thing. I am one of the crowd. He has the marked individuality which fascinates or repels."

"And you will be friends still, Allan—my poor wilful son and you? He is like a ship without a rudder, now that he has left the army. He has no intimate friends. He cannot rest long in one place. I never wanted him to steal your sweetheart, Allan. I am sure you know that. But I should be very glad to see him married."

"You will see him married before long—and to the lady who was once my sweetheart."

Mrs. Wornock shook her head; and the argument was closed by the appearance of Geoffrey himself, who came sauntering in from the garden, with his favourite Clumber spaniel at his heels.

"Been shooting?" Allan asked, as they shook hands.

There was a certain aloofness in their greeting, but nothing churlish or sullen in the manner of either. On Geoffrey's side there was only listlessness; on Allan's a grave reserve.

"No. I look at my dogs every day. The keepers do the rest."

"You are not fond of shooting?"

"Not particularly—not of creeping about a copse on the look-out for a cock pheasant, still less do I love a hot corner!"

He seated himself on the bench by the organ, and began to turn over a pile of music, idly, vacantly almost, not as if he were looking for anything in particular. Allan rose to go, and Mrs. Wornock followed him to the corridor.

"Does he not look wretched? And wretchedly ill?" she asked appealingly; her own unhappiness visible in every line of her face.

"He is certainly changed for the worse since I saw him last. That was a longish time ago, you may remember. He looks hipped and worried. He should go away, as I am going."

"Not like you, Allan, to a savage country. I wish he would take me to Italy for the winter. We could move from place to place. He could change the scene as often as he liked."

"I fear the mind would be the same, though earth and sky might change. Travelling upon beaten paths would only bore him. If he is unhappy, and you are unhappy about him, you had better let him come with Patrington and me."

The offer was made on the impulse of the moment, out of sympathy with the mother rather than out of regard for the son.

"No, no, I could not bear to lose him again—so soon. What would my life be like if you were both gone? I should lapse into

the old loneliness—and solitude would bring back the old dreams—the old vain longing——"

These last words were murmured brokenly, in self-communion.

Allan left her, and she went back to the music-room, where Geoffrey had seated himself at the piano, and was playing a Spanish dance by Sarasate, for the edification of the spaniel, who looked agonized.

"What have you been saying to Carew, mother?" he asked, stopping in the middle of a phrase.

"Nothing of any importance. Allan is going to Central Africa with a friend he met in Suffolk—a Mr. Patrington."

"A Mr. Patrington? I suppose you mean Cecil Patrington?"

"Yes, that is the name."

CHAPTER XXVI.

"I GO TO PROVE MY SOUL."

ALLAN lost no time in making his preparations. He ordered everything that Mr. Patrington told him to order, and in all things followed the advice of that experienced traveller, who consented to spend his last fortnight in England at Beechhurst, where his appearance excited considerable interest in the local mind. He allowed Allan to mount him, and went out with the South Sarum; and as he neither dressed, rode, nor looked like anybody else, he was the object of some curiosity among those outsiders who did not know him as the famous African hunter, a man who had made himself a name casually, while following the bent of his own fancy, and caring nothing what his countrymen at home thought about him.

Lady Emily was her son's guest during the last week, anxious to be with him till he sailed, to postpone the parting till the final day. She was full of sorrow at the idea of a separation, which was to last for at least two years, and might extend to double that time if the climate and the manner of life in Central Africa suited him. Stanley had taken nearly a year and a half going and returning between Zanzibar and Ujiji, and Stanley had been a much quicker traveller than previous explorers. And Mr. Patrington talked of Ujiji as a starting-point for journeys to the north, and to the west, rambling explorations over less familiar regions, and anon a leisurely journey down to Nyassaland, the African Arcadia. His plans, if carried out, would occupy five or six years.

That sturdy traveller laughed at the mother's apprehensions.

"My dear Lady Emily, you are under a delusion as to the remoteness of the great lake country. Should your son grow home-sick, something less than a three months' journey will bring him from the Tanganyika to the Thames. Sixty years ago, it took longer to travel from Bombay to London than it does now to come from the heart of Africa."

The mother sighed, and looked mournfully at her son. He was unhappy, and travel and adventure would perhaps afford the best cure for his low spirits. She discussed the situation with Mrs. Mornington when that lady called upon her.

"Your niece has acted very cruelly," she said.

"My niece has acted like a fool. She has made two young men unhappy, and left herself out in the cold. I saw Geoffrey Wornock last week, and he was looking a perfect wreck."

"Do you think she cared for him?"

"The girl must care for somebody. Looking back now, I can see that there was a change in her—a gradual change—after Geoffrey Wornock's return. It was very unfortunate. Either young man would have been a capital match;" added Mrs. Mornington, waxing practical; "but she could not marry them both!"

Lady Emily felt angry with Geoffrey as the cause of unhappiness, the indirect cause of the coming separation between herself and her son. How happy she might have been had all gone smoothly! Allan would have settled at Beechhurst with his young wife; but they would have spent nearly half of every year in Suffolk. How happy her own life might have been with the son she loved, and the girl whom she was ready to take to her heart as a daughter, but for this wilful cruelty on the part of Suzette!

Lady Emily was sitting in the Mandarin-room with her son and his friend late in the evening, their last evening but one in England. To-morrow they were all going to London together, and on the day after the travellers would embark on the P. and O. for Zanzibar.

The night was wet and windy, and a large wood fire burnt and crackled on the ample hearth. Lady Emily had her embroidered coverlet spread over her lap, and her work-table drawn conveniently near her elbow, in the light of a shaded lamp, while the two men lounged in luxurious chairs in front of the fire. The room looked the picture of comfort, the men companionable, content, and homely, and the mother's heart sank at the thought that years must pass before such an evening could repeat itself, and before her poor

Allan would be sitting in so comfortable a chair. It was not without regret that her son had contemplated the idea of their separation, or of his mother's solitary home when he should be gone. He had talked with her of the coming years, suggested the nieces or girl-friends whom she might invite to enliven the slumberous house, and to enjoy the beauty of those fertile gardens and level park-like meadows that stretched to the edge of the river.

"You have troops of friends, mother, and you will have plenty of occupation with your farm, and sovereign power over the whole estate. Drake"—the bailiff—"will have to consult you about everything."

"Yes, there will be much to be looked at and thought about; but I shall miss you every hour of my life, Allan."

"Not as much as if I had been living at home."

"Every bit as much. I was quite happy thinking of you here. How can I be happy when I picture you toiling alone in the desert under a broiling sun—no water—even the camels dropping and dying under their burdens."

"Dear mother, be happy as to the camels. We shall not be in the camel country. We shall see very little of sandy deserts. Shadowy woods, fertile valleys, the margins of great lakes will be our portion."

"And you will drink the water—which is sure to be unwholesome—and you will get fever."

Allan did not tell his mother that fever was inevitable, a phase of African life which every traveller must reckon with. He represented African travel as a perpetual holiday in a land of infinite beauty.

"Would Patrington go back there if it were not a delightful life?" he argued. "He has not to get his living there, as the poor fellows have who grill and bake themselves for half a lifetime in India. He goes because he loves the life."

"He goes to shoot big game. He is a horrid, bloodthirsty creature."

Little by little, however, Lady Emily had allowed herself to be persuaded that Central Africa was not so hideous a region as she had supposed. She was told that there were bits of country like Suffolk, a home-like Arcadia on the shores of Nyassa which would remind her of her own farm.

"Then why not make that district your head-quarters?" she argued, appealing to Patrington.

"We shall have no head-quarters. We shall wander from one interesting spot to another. We shall settle down only in the Masika season, when travelling is out of the question—not so much because it couldn't be done as because the blackies won't do it. They are uncommonly careful of themselves; won't budge in the rains, won't take a canoe on the lake, if there's a bit of a swell on."

"I am glad of that," sighed Lady Emily, with an air of relief; "I am very glad the negroes are prudent and careful."

"A deuced deal too prudent, my dear Lady Emily."

The men were sitting at a table looking at a map, one of Patrington's own rough maps, scrawled and splotched with a blunt quill pen. He was showing Allan where more scientific map-makers had gone wrong.

"Here's the Lualaba, you see, and here's the little wood where we camped—I seldom use a tent if I can help it, but there wasn't a village within ten miles of that spot."

The door was opened and a servant announced—

"Mr. Wornock."

Allan started up, surprised, thrown off his balance by Geoffrey's entrance. It was half-past ten—Matcham bedtime.

"You have come to bid us good-bye," Allan said, recovering his self-possession as they shook hands. "This is very kind and friendly of you."

"I have come to do nothing of the kind. I want to join your party, if you and your friend will have me."

He spoke in his lightest tone; but he was looking worn and ill, and there were all the signs of sleeplessness and worry in his haggard face.

"I know it's the eleventh hour," he said, "but I heard you say," looking from Allan to Patrington, "that your important preparations have to be made at Zanzibar, where you buy most of the things you want. I—I only made up my mind this evening, after dinner. I am bored in England. There is nothing for me to do. I get so tired of things——"

"And your mother?" hazarded Allan, feebly.

"My mother is accustomed to doing without me. I believe I only worry her when I am at home. Will you take me, Carew? Yes, or no?"

"Why, of course it is yes, Mr. Wornock," exclaimed Lady Emily, coming from the other end of the room, where she had been folding up her work for the night. "Allan, why don't you introduce Mr. Wornock to me?"

She was radiant, charmed at the idea of a third traveller, and such a traveller as the Squire of Discombe. It seemed to lessen the peril of the expedition, that this other man should want to go, should offer himself thus lightly, on the eve of departure.

She shook hands with Geoffrey in the friendliest way, looking at the wan, worn face with keen interest. Like Allan? Yes, he was like, but not so good-looking. His features were too sharply cut; his hollow cheeks and sunken eyes made him look ever so much older than Allan, thought the mother, admiring her own son above all the world.

"Of course they will take you," she said, looking from one to the other. "It will make the expedition ever so much pleasanter for them both. They will feel less lonely."

"I ain't afraid of loneliness," growled Patrington; "but if Mr. Wornock really wishes to go with us, and will fall into our plans, and not want to make alterations, and upset our route now and again, I'm agreeable. It isn't always easy for three men to get on smoothly, you see. Even two don't always hit it—Burton and Speke, for instance. There were bothers."

"You shall be my chief and captain," protested Geoffrey, "and if you should tire of me, well, I can always wander off on my own hook, you know. I could start by myself, now, take my chance and trust to native guides, choose another line of country, where I couldn't molest you——"

"Molest! My dear Wornock, if you are really in earnest, really inclined to join us as a pleasant thing to do, and not a caprice of the moment, I shall be glad to have you, and I think Patrington will have no objection," said Allan, hastily.

"Not the slightest. I only want unity of purpose. You don't look in the best possible health," added Patrington, bluntly; "but you can rough it, I suppose?"

"Yes; I'm not afraid of hardships."

"I should like to have a few words with you before anything is settled, if you will take a turn on the terrace," said Allan, and on Geoffrey assenting, he went over to the glass door, and led the way to the gravel walk outside.

The rain was over, and the moon was shining out of a ragged mass of cloud.

"Why do you leave this place, now, when you are master of the situation?" Allan asked abruptly, when he and Geoffrey had walked a few paces.

"I am not master, no more than a beaten hound is master. I have mastered nothing, not even the lukewarm regard which she still professes for you. She has thrown you over, but I am not to be the gainer. I went to her directly I knew she was free. I offered myself to her, an adoring slave. But she would have none of me. She did not love you enough to be your wife; but for me she had only contempt, cruel words, mocking laughter that cut me like a bunch of scorpions. I am frank with you, Carew. If I had a ghost of a chance, I would follow her to Schwalbach, to the Riviera, all round this globe on which we crawl and suffer. Distance should not divide us. But I am too much a man to pursue a woman who scorns me. I want to forget her; I mean to forget her; and I think I might have a chance if I went with you and your chum yonder. I should like to go with you, unless you dislike me too much to be happy in my company."

"Dislike you! No, indeed, I do not."

"I'm glad of that. My mother is very fond of you. You have been to her almost as a son. It will comfort her to think that we are together, together in danger and difficulty, and if one of us should not come back——"

"Nonsense, Wornock. Of course we are coming back. Look at Patrington——"

"Ah, but he has been a solitary traveller. When two go, there is always one who stays."

"If you think that, you had much better stop at home."

"No, no; the risk is the best part of the business to a man of my temper. It's the toss-up that I like. Heads, a safe return; tails, death in the wilderness—death by niggers, wild beasts, flood, or fire. I go with my life in my hand, as the catch phrase of the day has it; and if there were no hazards, no danger—well, one might as well stay at home, or play polo at Simla. Allan, we have been rivals, but not enemies. Shall we be brothers henceforward?"

"Yes, friends and brothers, if you will."

They went back to the Mandarin-room, and when Lady Emily had bidden them good night, the three men lit up pipes and cigars, and talked about that wonder-world of tropical Africa, and what they were to do there, till the night grew late, and the Manor groom, dozing on the settle by the saddle-room fire after a hearty supper of beef and beer, questioned querulously whether his guv'nor meant to go home before daylight.

CHAPTER XXVII.

BLACK AND WHITE.

A YEAR and more, spring and summer, autumn and winter, had gone by since Allan Carew and his companions set their faces towards the Dark Continent; and now it was spring again, the early spring of Central Africa; and under the pale cloudless blue of a tropical sky three white men, with their modest following of Wangwana and Wanyamwezi—a company no bigger than that with which Captain Trivier crossed from shore to shore—camped beside the Sea of Ujiji. They had come from the east, and the journey from the coast opposite Zanzibar, taken very easily, with many halting-places on the way, had occupied the best part of a year. Some of those resting-places had been chosen for sport, for exploration, for repose after weary and troublesome stages. Sometimes a long halt had been forced upon the travellers by sickness, by inclement weather, by the rebellion or the perversity of their men—those porters upon whose endurance and good will their comfort and safety alike depended in a land where it has been truly said that "luggage is life."

That march from Bagamoyo, Stanley's starting-point, through the vicissitudes of the road and the seasons, had not been all pleasure; and there were darker hours on the way, when, toiling on with aching head and blistered feet, half stifled by the rank mists and poisonous odours of a jungle that smelt of death, Allan Carew and his companions may have wished themselves back in the beaten paths of a civilized world, where there is no need to think of bed or dinner, and where all that life requires for sustenance and comfort seems to come of itself. But if there had been weak yearnings for the comfortable, as opposed to the adventurous, not one of the three travellers had ever given any indication of such backsliding. Each in his turn stricken down—not once, but often—by the deadly mukunguru, or African fever, had rallied and girded his loins for the journey without an hour's needless delay; and then, on recovery, there had followed a fervent joy in life and nature; a rapture in the atmosphere; a keener eye for every changeful light and colour in earth and sky; the blissful sensations of a newly created being, basking in a new world. It was almost worth a man's while to pass through the painful stages of that deadly fever, the ague fit and languor, the yawning and drowsiness which mark the beginning of

sickness, the raging thirst and throbbing temples, the aching spine and hideous visions, which are its later agonies, in order to feel that ecstasy of restored health when the convalescent sees ineffable loveliness even in the dull monotony of rolling woods, and thrills with friendship and love for the dusky companions of his journey.

Loneliness and horror, pleasantness and danger, a startling variety of scenes had been traversed between the red coast of Eastern Africa and that vast inland sea where many rivers meet and mingle in the deep bosom of the mountains. Across the monotony of rolling woods that rise and fall in a seemingly endless sequence; by fever-haunted plains and swampy hollows; through the dripping scrub of the Makata wilderness; in all the dull horror of the Masika season, when the long swathes of tiger-grass lie rotting under the brooding mists that curtain the foul-smelling waste, when the Makata river has changed from a narrow stream to a vast lake which covers the plain, and in whose shallow waters trees and canes and lush green parasites subside into tangled masses of putrid vegetation, until to the traveller's weary eye it seems as if this very earth were slowly rotting in an universal and final decay.

They had come through many a settlement, friendly or unfriendly, through rivers difficult to cross by ford or ferry, difficult and costly too, since there are dusky sultans who take toll of these white adventurers at every ferry, sometimes rival chiefs who set up a claim to the same ferry, and have to be defied or satisfied—generally the latter; through many a *guet à pens*, where the whit-whit of the long arrows sounded athwart the woods as the travellers hurried by; through scenes of beauty and romantic grandeur; across vast expanses of green sward diversified with noble timber, calmly picturesque as an English park—a hunter's paradise of big game. They had journeyed at a leisurely pace, loitering wherever Nature invited to enjoyment, their camp of the simplest, their followers as few as the absolute necessities of the route demanded.

By these same forest paths, fighting his way through the same inexorable jungle, Burton had come on his famous voyage of discovery to the unknown lake; and by the same, or almost the same, paths Stanley had followed in his search for the great God-fearing traveller, brave and calm and patient, who had made Africa his own. And here had come Cameron, meeting that dead lord of untrodden lands, journeying on other men's shoulders, no longer the guide and chief, but the silent companion of a sorrowful pilgrimage. Lonely as the way might be, it was peopled with heroic memories.

"I should like to have been the first to come this way," Geoffrey

had said with a vexed air, as he twirled the tattered leaves of Burton s book, which, with Stanley's and Cameron's travels, and Goethe's "Faust," composed the whole of his library.

"You would always like to be the first," Allan answered, laughingly. "Is it not enough for you that you are the mightiest hunter of us three—the father of meat, as our boys call you—and that finer giraffes and harte beestes have fallen before your gun than even Patrington can boast, experienced sportsman though he is?"

Patrington assented with a lazy comfortable laugh, stretched his legs on the reed mat under the rough verandah, and refilled his pipe.

He was content to take the second place in the record of sport, and to let this restless fiery spirit satisfy its feverish impulses in the toils and perils of the jungle or the plain.

Here was a young man with an insatiable love of sport, an activity of brain and body which nothing tired, and it was just as well to let him work for the party, while the older traveller, and nominal chief of the expedition, basked in the February sun, and read "Pickwick."

A little brown-leather bound Bible, which he had used a good many years before at Harrow, and a dozen or so of Tauchnitz volumes, all by the same author, and all tattered and torn in years of travel and continual reperusal, constituted Mr. Patrington's stock of literature. Allan was the only member of the party who had burdened himself with a varied library of a dozen or so of those classics which a man cannot read too much or too often; for, indeed, could any man, not actually a student, exercise so much restraint over himself as to restrict his reading for three or four years to a dozen or so of the world's greatest books, that man would possess himself of a better literary capital than the finest library in London or Paris can provide for the casual reader, hurrying from author to author, from history to metaphysics, from Homer to Horace, from Herodotus to Froude, and wasting years of careless reading upon those snares to the idle reader—books about books. Half the intelligent readers in England know more about Mr. Pater's opinion of Shelley or Mr. Forman's estimate of Keats than they know of the poems that made Shelley and Keats famous.

Dickens reigned alone in Cecil Patrington's literary Valhalla. He always talked of the author of "Pickwick" as "he" or "him." Like Mr. du Maurier's fine gentleman who thought there was only one man in London who could make a hat, Mr. Patrington would only recognize one humorist and one writer of fiction.

"How he would have enjoyed this kind of life!" he said. "What fun he would have got out of those crocodiles! What a word picture he would have made of our storms, and the Masika rains, and those rolling woods, that illimitable forest t'other side of Ukonongo! and how he would have understood all the ins and outs in the minds of our Zanzibaris, and of the various nigger-chiefs whose society we have enjoyed, and whose demands we have had to satisfy upon the road!"

"Have they minds?" asked Geoffrey, with open scorn. "I doubt the existence of anything you can call mind in the African cranium. Hunger and greed are the motive power that moves the native mechanism; but mind, no. They have ferocious instincts, such as beasts have, and the craving for food. Feed them, and they will love you to-day; but they will rob and murder you to-morrow, if they see the chance of gaining by the transaction."

"Oh, come, I won't have our boys maligned. I have lived among them for years, remember, while you are only a new-comer. Granted that they are greedy. They are only greedy as children are. They are like children——"

"Exactly. They are like children. They could not be like anything worse."

"What!" cried Patrington, with a look of horror, "have you no faith in the goodness and purity of a child?"

"In its goodness, not a whit! Purity, yes; the purity of ignorance, which we call innocence, and pretend to admire as an exquisite and touching attribute of the undeveloped human being. These blackies are just as good and just as bad as the average child; greedy, grasping, selfish; selfish, grasping, greedy; ready to kiss the feet of the man who comes back to the village with an antelope on his shoulder; ready to send a poisoned arrow after him if on parting company he refuses to be swindled out of cloth or beads. They are bad, Patrington—if I were not a disciple of Locke, I would say they are innately bad. But what does that matter? We are all bad."

"What a pleasant way you have of looking at life and your fellow-men!" said Patrington.

"I look life and my fellow-man full in the face, and I ask myself if there is any man living whose nature—noble, perhaps, according to the world's esteem—does not include a latent capacity for evil. Every man and every woman, the best as well as the worst, is a potential criminal. Do you think that Macbeth, who came over the

heath at sundown after the battle, was a scoundrel? Not he. There was not a captain in the Scottish army more loyally devoted to his king. He was only an ambitious man. Temptation and opportunity did all the rest. Temptation, were it only strong enough, and opportunity, would make a murderer of you or me."

"'Lead us not into temptation.' Oh, wondrous wise and simple prayer, which riseth every night and morning out of the mouths of babes and sucklings over all the Christian world, and in a few brief phrases includes every aspiration needful for humanity!" said Cecil Patrington, who was in matters theological just where he had been when his boyish head was bowed under the episcopal hand on the day of his confirmation.

Far away from new books and new opinions, knowing not the names of Spencer or Clifford, Schopenhauer, or Hartmann, this rough traveller's religion was the religion of Paul Dombey, of Hester Summerson and Agnes Whitfield and Little Nell, of all the gentlest creatures in the Pantheon of Charles Dickens.

There was leisure and to spare for argument and discussion here in this quiet settlement on the shore of the great lake. The travellers had established themselves in a deserted *tembe*, which had been allotted to them by the Arab chieftain of the land, and which was pleasantly situated on a ridge of rising ground about a mile from the busy village of Ujiji. They had done all that laborious ingenuity could do to purify the rough clay structure, ridding it as far as possible of the plague of insects that crawled in the darkness below or buzzed in the thatch above, of the rats which the dusk of evening brought out in gay and familiar riot, and the snakes that followed in their train, and the huge black spiders, whose webs choked every corner. They had knocked out openings under the deep eaves of the thatched roof—openings which allowed of cross-currents of air, and were regarded by their Zanzibaris and Unyanyembis with absolute horror. Only once in their pilgrimage had they found a hut with windows.

"What does a man want in his *tembe* but warmth and shelter? And how can these white men be so foolish as to make openings that let in the cold?" argued the native mind; nor was the native mind less exercised by the trouble these three white men took to keep their *tembe* and its surroundings, the verandah, the ground about it, severely clean, or by their war of extermination against that insect life whose ravages the African suffers with a stoical indifference.

The travellers had established themselves in this convenient spot

—close to the port and market of Ujiji—to wait for the Masika, the season of rain that raineth every day—rain that closes round the camp like a dense wall of water—such rain as a man must go to the tropics to see, and which, once having seen, he is not likely to forget. They could hardly be better off anywhere, when the rains of April should come upon them, than they would be here. The natives were friendly; friendly too, friendly and kind and helpful, was the mighty Arab chief Roumariza, the white Arab, sovereign lord of these regions, sole master here, where the sceptre of the Sultan of Zanzibar reaches not: a man whose word is law, and in whose hand is plenty.

Roumariza looked upon Cecil Patrington's party with the eye of favour, and upon Patrington as an old friend—nay, almost a subject of his own, so familiar was Patrington's bronzed face in those regions, whither he had come close upon the footsteps of Cameron, and when that lake land of tropical Africa was still a new world, untrodden by the white man's foot, the northern shores of the lake still unexplored, the vast country of Rua unknown even to the Arabs.

At Ujiji provisions were plentiful and even cheap. At Ujiji there were boat-builders; and canoes and rowers were at hand for the exploration of the vast fresh-water sea. Indeed, there was only too much civilization and human life to please that son of the wilderness, Cecil Patrington.

"I love the unknown better than the known," he said. "We shall never see the lake again as Burton saw it—before ever the sound of engine and paddle-wheel had been heard on that broad blue expanse, when the monkeys chattered and screamed and slung themselves from tree to tree in a tumult of wonder at sight of the white wayfarer. Nobody can ever enjoy the sense of rapture and surprise that took Cameron's breath away as he looked down from the hills and saw the wide-reaching, pale blue water flashing in the sun. He took the lake itself for a cloud at the first glance, and a little inlet for the lake, and asked his men, with bitterest chagrin, 'Is this all?' And then the niggers pointed, and these vast waters spread themselves out of the cloud, and he saw this mighty sea shining out of its dark frame of mountain and palm forest. Jupiter, what a moment! I could never enjoy that surprise. I had read Cameron's book, and he had discounted the situation for me; he had swindled me out of my emotions. I knew the breadth and length of the lake to within a mile—no chance of mistake for me. Yes, I said. Here is the Tanganyika, and it is a very fine sheet of

blue water; and pray where is the Swiss porter to take my luggage? or where shall I find the omnibus for the best hotel? Mark me, lads, before we have been long underground, there will be hotels and omnibuses and Swiss porters, and the Cooks and Gazes of the future will deal in through tickets to the African lakes, and this great heart of Africa will be the Englishman's favourite holiday ground. Let but the tramway Stanley talks about be laid from Bagamoyo to the interior, and 'Arry will be lord of Central Africa, as he is of the rest of the earth."

Idle talk in idle hours beside the camp-fire. Though the days were as sunny and summer-like as February on the Riviera, the nights were cold; and after sundown masters and men liked to sit by their fires and watch the pine-wood crackle and the flames leap through the smoke like living things, vanish and reappear, fade into darkness or flicker into light with swifter and more sudden movement than even the thoughts of the men who watched them.

The porters and servants had their own huts and their own fires. They had made a rough stockade round the cluster of bee-hive huts—a snug settlement, which Allan compared to a mediæval fortress, one of the Scottish castles, whose inhabitants live and move in the pages of the Wizard of the North. Allan was a devoted worshipper of Scott, whom he held second only to Shakespeare; and as Cecil Patrington claimed exactly this position for Charles Dickens, the question afforded an inexhaustible subject for argument, sometimes mild and philosophical, sometimes vehement and angry, to which Geoffrey listened yawningly, or into which he plunged with superior vehemence and arbitrary assertion if it were his humour to be interested.

In a land where there was no daily record of what mankind were doing, no newspaper at morning and evening recounting the last pages of the world's history, telling the story of yesterday's crimes and catastrophes, sickness and death, wrong and right, evil and good, adventures, successes, failures, inventions, gains and losses—every movement near or far in the great mill-wheel of human life—deprived of newspapers, of civilized society, and of all the business of money-getting and money-spending, it was only in such discussions that these exiles could find subjects for conversation. The contents of the letters and papers that had reached them three months before at Tabora, brought on from Zanzibar by an Arab caravan bound for the hunting-grounds of Rua, had been long exhausted; and now there was only the populace of the great

romancers to talk about in the long chilly evenings, when they were in no mood for piquet or poker, and too lazy-brained for the arduous pleasures of chess. Then it was pleasant to lie in front of the fire and dispute the merits of one's favourite novelist, or some abstract question in the regions of philosophy. Sometimes the three men's talk would wander from Dickens to Plato, from Scott to Aristotle, from Macaulay to Thucydides. Allan was the most bookish of the three, and his knowledge of German enabled him to carry the lightest of travelling-libraries, in the shape of that handy series of little paper-covered books which includes the best German authors, together with translations of all the classics, ancient and modern, Greek, Latin, Norse, English, French, Italian, at twopence a volume—tiny booklets, of which he could carry half a dozen in the pockets of his flannel jacket, and which comprised the literature of the world in the smallest possible compass.

For more than a year, these three men had been dependent upon one another's society for all intellectual solace, for all mental comfort; for more than a year they had looked upon no white faces but their own, so tanned and darkened by sun and weather that they had come to talk of themselves laughingly as white Arabs, or semi-negroids, and to opine that they would never look like Englishmen again. Indeed, Cecil Patrington, whose fifteen years of manhood had been chiefly spent under tropic stars, had no desire ever again to wear the sickly aspect of the home-keeping Englishman, whom he spoke of disparagingly as a turnip-face. Bronzed and battered, and hardened by the hard life of the desert, he laughed to scorn the amenities of modern civilization and the iron bondage of the claw-hammer coat.

"Male humanity is divided into two classes—the men who dress for dinner, and the men who don't. I have always belonged to the latter half. We are the freemen; our shoulders have never borne the yoke. I ran away from every school I was ever sent to. I played Hell and Tommy at my private tutor's Berkshire parsonage—set fire to his study when he locked me in, with an order to construe five tough pages of 'Thicksides' for insubordination. I set fire to his waste-paper basket, lads, and his missus's muslin curtains. I knew I could put the fire out with his garden-hose, when I had given him a good scare; and after that little bit of arson, he was uncommonly glad to get rid of me. The old Herod had insisted on my dressing for dinner every night—putting on a claw-hammer coat and a white tie to eat barley-broth and hashed mutton. I

wasn't going to stop in such a *bouge* as that. Then came the university. I was always able to scramble through an exam., so I matriculated with flying colours—passed my Little Go with a flourish of trumpets; and my people hoped I had turned over a new leaf. So I had, boys—a new leaf in a new book. I had begun to read the story of African travel—Livingstone, Burton, Baker, du Chaillu, Stanley. And from that hour I knew what manner of life I was meant for. I got my kind old dad to give me a biggish cheque—compounded with him, before my second term at Trinity was over, for the fifteen hundred my university career would have cost him—and sailed for the Cape; and from that day to this, except when I read a paper one night in Savile Row, I have never worn the garment of the white slave. I have never thrust these hairy arms of mine into the silk-lined sleeves of a claw-hammer coat."

For the eldest traveller those days before the coming of the Masika left nothing to be desired. The long coasting voyages on the great fresh-water sea, the canoes following the romantic shores or threading that southern archipelago where the river Lofu pours its broad stream into the lake, were enough for exercise, excitement, variety.

For Cecil Patrington—for the man who carried no burden of bitter memories, whose heart ached not with the yearning for home faces, the joys of Central Africa were all-sufficing. He had been happy in scenes far less lovely; happy in arid deserts such as the Roman poet pictured to himself in the luxurious repose of his suburban villa—deserts to be made endurable by the presence of Lalage. Cecil Patrington would not have exchanged his Winchester rifle for the loveliest Lalage; he wanted to kill, not to be killed. No sweetly smiling, no prettily prattling society would have made up to him for the lack of big game and the means of slaughter. Perhaps he, too, had dreamed his dream, even as Mr. Jaggers had. There is no man so unlikely of aspect that he may not once have been a lover. Is not the faithfullest, fondest lover in all modern fiction the hunchback Quasimodo? But if this rough sportsman had ever succumbed to the common fever, had ever sighed and suffered, his malady was a thing of the remote past. In his most confidential talk there had never been the faintest indication of a romantic attachment.

"Why did I never marry?" he echoed, when the question was asked jestingly, beside the camp-fire, in the early stages of their

journey. "I had neither time nor inclination, nor money to waste upon such an expensive toy as a wife; a wife who would eat her head off in England while I was knocking about over here, a wife who would cost me more than a caravan."

This was all that Mr. Patrington ever said about the matrimonial question; but marriage is a subject upon which some men never reveal their real thoughts.

He took life as merrily as if it had been a march in a comic opera, and in the presence of his cheerfulness the two young men kept their troubles to themselves.

Had Allan forgotten Suzette under those tropic stars? No, he had not achieved forgetfulness; but he had learnt to live without love, without the light of a fair woman's face; and in a modified way to be happy. The changes and chances, difficulties, accidents, and adventures of the journey between the coast and Tabora had kept his mind fully occupied. Fever, and recovery from fever; failure or success with his gun; difficult negotiations with village sultans; and even an occasional skirmish in which the poisoned arrows flew fast, and the stern necessity of firing on their assailants had stared them in the face; all these things had left little leisure for love-sick dreams, for fond regrets.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE MEETING-PLACE OF WATERS.

At Tabora there had been a long halt, a delay forced upon the travellers by the conditions of climate, by the sickness and the idleness of their caravan; but this interval of rest had not been altogether disagreeable. The place was a place of fatness, a settlement in the midst of a fertile plain where the flocks and herds, the Arab population, the pastoral life suggested those familiar pictures in that first book of ancient history which the child takes into his newly awakened consciousness; and which the hard and battered wayfarer—believer or agnostic—loves and admires to the end of life. In just such a scene as this Rebecca might have given Isaac the fateful draught of water from the wayside well; upon just such a level pasture Joseph and his brethren might have tended their flocks. The visions of the young dreamer would have shown him

this pale milky azure, over-arching the rich level where the sheaves bowed down to his sheaves; and in just such a reposeful atmosphere would he have laid himself down for the noontide siesta, and let his fancy slide into the dim labyrinth of dreamland.

At Tabora there had been overmuch time for thought, and the yearning for a far-away face must needs have been in the hearts of both those young Englishmen, whose bronzed features were sternly and steadily set with the resolute calm of men who do not mean to waste in despair and die for love of the fairest woman upon earth.

Often and often in the dusk, Allan heard his comrade's rich baritone rolling out that old song—

> "Shall I, wasting in despair, die because a woman's fair?
> Shall my cheeks grow pale with care
> Because another's rosy are?"

The voice thrilled him. What a gift is that music which gives a man power over his fellow-men! Geoffrey's fiddle talked to them nearly every night beside the camp-fire, talked to them sometimes at daybreak, when its owner had been sleepless; for that restless spirit had watched too many long blank hours in the course of his travels. It had been hard work to convey that fiddle-case across the rolling woods, through swamp and river, guarded from the crass stupidity of native porters—from the obstinacy of the African donkey—the curiosity of the inhabitants of the villages on the way. Geoffrey had carried it himself for the greater part of the journey; refusing to trust Arab or Negroid with so precious a burden. Riding or walking, he had managed to take care of his little Amati, the smallest but not the least valuable of all his fiddles.

There were some among his dark followers to whom Geoffrey's Amati was an enchanted thing, a thing that ought to have been alive if it was not; indeed, there were some who secretly believed that it was a living creature. The velvet nest in which he kept the strange thing, the delicate care with which he laid it in that luxurious resting-place, or took it out into the light of day; the loving movement with which he rested his chin on the shining wood, while his long lissome fingers twined themselves caressingly about the creature's neck; the strange light that came into his eyes as he drew the bow across the strings, and the ineffable sounds which those strings gave forth; all these were tokens of a living presence, a something to be loved and feared.

When he tuned his fiddle, they thought that he was punishing it, and that it shrieked and groaned in pain. Why else were those

sounds so harsh and discordant, so unlike the melting strains which the thing gave forth when he laid his chin upon it and loved it, when his lips smiled, and his melancholy eyes looked far away into the purple distances, across the woods and the plains, to the remoteness of the mountain range beyond.

If it were not actually alive—if it had neither heart nor blood as they had, why, then, it was a familiar demon—a charm—by which he who possessed it could influence his fellow-men. He could rouse them to savage raptures, to shrieks and wild leaps that were meant for dancing. He could melt them to tears.

From the first hour when he played by the camp-fire, on the third night after they left Bagamoyo, Geoffrey's music had given him a hold over the more intelligent members of the caravan. They had listened at first almost as the dog listens, and had been ready to lift up their heads and howl as the dog howls. But gradually those singing sounds had exercised a soothing influence, they had sprawled at his feet, a ring of listeners, with elbows on the ground, looking up at him out of onyx eyes that flashed in the firelight.

Among their followers there were some Makololos from the Shire Valley, men of superior courage and determination, a finer race than the common herd of African porters, of the same race as those faithful followers of Livingstone's first great journey, who afterwards became chiefs and rulers of the land. These Makololos adored Geoffrey. His music, the achievements of his Winchester rifle, that ardent fitful temperament of his, exercised an extraordinary influence over these men; and it seemed as if they would have followed him without fee or reward, for sheer love of the man himself; not for meat, and cloth, and beads, and brass wire.

Never a word said Geoffrey or Allan of that one woman whose image filled the minds of both. They talked of other people freely enough. Each spoke of his mother tenderly, regretfully even, Allan taking comfort from the thought of Lady Emily's delight in her farm, the occupation and interest which every change of the seasons brought for her. Such letters as had reached him on his wanderings had been resigned and uncomplaining, although dwelling sorrowfully upon the husband she had lost.

"He used to live so much apart, shut in his library day after day, and only joining me in the evening, that I could hardly have believed my life could seem so empty without him. But I know now how much his presence in the house—even his silent, unseen presence—meant for me; and I realize now how often I used to go to him,

interrupting his dreamy life with my petty household questions, my little bits of news from the farmyard or the cow-houses, or the garden. He was so kind and sympathetic. He would look up from his books to interest himself in some story about my Brahmas or my Cochins, and if he was bored, he never allowed me to see the faintest sign of impatience. I think he was the best and truest man that ever lived. And my Allan is like him. May God protect and bless my dearest, my only dear, in all the perils of the desert!"

Lady Emily's mental picture of Africa represented one far-reaching waste of level sand, a desert flatness incompatible with a spherical earth, pervaded by camels, and occasionally varied by a mirage. A pair of pyramids—like tall candlesticks at the end of a board-room table—a sphinx and a crocodily river occupied the north-east corner of this vast plateau, while the south-west was distinguished by a colony of ostriches, and the place to which Indian officials used to resort for change of air some fifty years since. To these narrow limits were restricted Lady Emily's notions of the continent on which her son was now a wanderer. She feared that if he got out of the way of the crocodiles he might fall in with the ostriches, which doubtless were dangerous when encountered in large numbers; and she shuddered at the sight of her favourite feather fan.

Mrs. Wornock's letters were in a sadder strain. The key was distinctly minor. She wrote of her loneliness; of the monotonous days; the longing for the face that had vanished.

"My organ talks to me of you—Bach, Beethoven, Mozart, Mendelssohn, all tell me the same story. You are far away—away for a long time—and life is very sad."

There was not a word of Suzette in those letters. If she was ever at the Manor, if his mother retained her affection and found solace in her society, there was no hint of that consoling presence. It might be that the girl hated the house because of that vehement stormy love which had assailed her there; the love that would not let her be faithful to a more reasonable lover.

"And yet—and yet!" thought Geoffrey, hardly caring even in his own mind to put the question positively.

In his innermost consciousness there was the belief that she loved him—him, Geoffrey Wornock—that she had refused him perversely and foolishly, out of a mistaken sense of honour. She would not marry Allan whom she did not love; and she refused to marry

Geoffrey whom she did love, in order to spare her jilted lover the pain of seeing a rival's triumph.

"But I am not beaten yet," Geoffrey told himself. "When I go back to England—if I but find her free—I shall try again. Allan's wounds will have healed by that time; and even her Quixotic temper will have satisfied itself by the sacrifice of two years of her lover's life."

"'When I go back!" Musing sometimes on that prospect of the homeward journey, whether returning by the road they had come, or dropping down southward by Trivier's route to the Nyassa and the Zambesi, or by the more adventurous westward route by the forest and the Congo, the way by which Trivier had come to the Lake, whichever way were eventually chosen, Geoffrey asked himself if the three travellers would all go back?

"One shall be taken and the other left."

Throughout the record of African travel, there is that dark feature of the story; the traveller who is left behind. Sometimes it is the fever fiend that lays a scorching hand upon the fearless adventurer, flings him down to suffer thirst and pain and heaviness, and delirious horrors, in the foul darkness of a bee-hive hut, to die in a dream of home, with shadowy faces looking down at him, familiar voices talking with him. Sometimes he falls in a ring of savage foes, hemmed round with hideous faces, foes as fierce and implacable as lion or leopard; foes who kill for the sake of killing; or cannibals, for whom man is the choicest banquet. The hazards of the pilgrimage take every shape, death by drowning, death by massacre, death by small-pox or jungle fever, death by starvation, by the bursting of a gun, by beasts of prey. In every story of travel there is always that dark page which tells of the man who is left. Dillon, Farquhar, the two Pococks, Jameson, Bartelott, Weissemburger—the ghosts that haunt the pathways of tropical Africa are many; but those melancholy shadows exercise no deterring influence on the traveller who sets out to-day, strong, elate, hopeful, inspired by an eager curiosity which takes no heed of trouble or of risk.

"Which of us three is to stay behind?" Geoffrey asked himself in a gloomy wonder. Not Patrington. He had come to the stage at which the traveller bears a charmed life. It is seldom the experienced wanderer, the man of many journeys, who falls by the wayside. Hot-headed youth, bold in its ignorance of danger, perishes like a bird caught in a trap. The strong frame of the trained athlete shrivels like a leaf in the hot blast of fever. The careless boatman tempts the perils of a difficult passage, and is

swept over the stony bed of the torrent, and vanishes in the fathomless pool. The hardened traveller knows what he is about, and can reckon with the forces of that gigantic nature which he faces and defies. It is the tyro who pays the price of his inexperience, and, in the history of African travel, the survival of the fittest is the rule.

"Which of us?" That question had entered into the very fabric of Geoffrey's thoughts. Sometimes, sitting by the camp-fire as the chillness of night crept round them, a grisly fancy would flash across his reverie, and he would think that the pale mist that rose about Allan's figure, on the other side of the circle, was the visionary shroud which the Highlander sees upon the shoulders of a friend marked for death.

"Would it be Allan?" If it were Allan, he, Geoffrey, would hasten home to tell the sad story, and then—to claim her whose too-tender conscientiousness had refused happiness at Allan's expense. Allan gone, there would be no reason why she should deny her love.

"For I know, I know that she loves me," Geoffrey repeated to himself.

He had been telling himself that story ever since he left England. No denial from those lovely lips, no words of scorn, would convince him that he was unloved. He could recall looks and tones that told another story. He had seen the gradual change in her which told of an awakening heart.

"She never knew what love means till she knew me," he told himself. Did he wish for Allan's death? No, there was no such hideous thought in the dark labyrinth of his mind; or, at least, he believed that there was not. One must perish! He had so brooded over the story of former victims that he had taught himself to look upon one lost life as inevitable. But the lot was as likely to fall upon him as upon Allan. More likely, since his habits were more reckless and more adventurous than Allan's. If there was danger to be found, he and his Makalolos courted it. Shooting expeditions, raids upon unfriendly villages, hand-to-hand skirmishes with Mirambo's brigand tribes; he and his Makalolos were ready for anything. He had travelled over hundreds of miles with his warlike little gang—exploring, shooting, fighting—while Patrington and Allan were living in dreamy inaction, waiting for better weather, or for the recovery of half a dozen ailing pagazis. Assuredly he who ran such superfluous risks was the more likely to fall by the way. Well, death is a solution of all difficulties.

"If I am dead, it will matter to me very little that my bright, ineffable coquette is transformed into a sober, middle-aged wife, and that she and Allan are smiling at each other across the family breakfast-table, in a commonplace domestic paradise. But while I live and am young I shall think of her and long for her, and hate the lucky wretch who wins her. If we should both go back; if Patrington's tough bones are the bones that are to whiten by the way, and not Allan's or mine, why, then, we shall again be rivals; and the years of exile will be only a dream that we have dreamt."

It was a strange position in which these two young men found themselves. Friends, almost as brothers in the close intimacy of that solitude of three, only three civilized thinking beings amidst a crowd of creatures who seemed as far apart as if they had belonged to the forest fauna—the great antelope family—or the Simian race; these two, so nearly of an age, reared in the same country and the same social sphere, united and sympathetic at every point of contact between mind and mind, and yet keeping this one deep gulf of silence between them.

They spoke to each other freely of all things, except of her; and yet each knew that she was the one absorbing subject in the mind of the other. Each knew that her image went along with them, was never absent, never less distinctly lovely, even when the way was fullest of hardship and peril, when every yard of progress meant a struggle with thorns that tore them, and brambles that lashed them, and the tough, rank verdure-carpet that clogged their feet. Neither had ever ceased to remember her, or to think of these adventurous days as anything else than exile from her. Whatever interest or enjoyment there might be in that varied experience of a land where beauty and ugliness alternated with startling transitions, it was not possible that either Allan or Geoffrey could forget the reason they were there, far from the fair faces of women, and from all the ease and pleasantness of civilized life.

Geoffrey had the better chance of oblivion, since those wild excursions and explorations of his afforded all the excitement of the untrodden and the hazardous. The caravan road from the coast to Ujiji, with all its varieties of hardship, was too beaten a track for this fiery spirit. At every halting-place he went off at a tangent; and if his comrades threatened not to wait for his return, he would pledge himself to rejoin them further on, laughing to scorn every suggestion that he and his little company of Makololos and Wanyamwesis could lose themselves in the wilderness.

He was more in touch with the men than Allan—as familiar with their ways and ideas as Patrington after many years of travel. He had learnt their languages with a marvellous quickness—not the copious language of civilization and literature, be it remembered, but the terse and useful vocabulary of the camp and the hunting-ground, the river and the road. He understood his men and their different temperaments as few travellers learn to understand, or desire to understand them. And yet there was but little Christian benevolence at the root of this quick sympathy and comprehension. Although, as an Englishman, Geoffrey would have given no sanction to the sale and barter of his fellow-creatures, these dark servants were to him no more than slaves—so much carrying power and so much fighting power, subject to his domination. It pleased him to know their characters, to be able to play upon their strength and weakness, their ferocity and their greed, just as surely as he manipulated the stops of the great organ at Discombe.

These Africans gave a name of their own choosing to almost everybody. They christened the great sultan of the interior Tippo-Tib, because of a curious blinking of his eyes. Captain Trivier obtained his nickname on account of his eye-glass. Another man was named after his spectacles. The Sultan of Ujiji was called Roumariza—"It is ended,"—because he had succeeded in reducing belligerent tribes to peaceful settlement. For the Englishman in particular, Africa could always find a nickname, based on some insignificant detail of manner or appearance. For Englishmen in general she had found a nobler-sounding name. She called them Sons of Fire.

Geoffrey, with his tireless energy, his rapid decision, his angry impatience of delay, seemed to his followers the very highest exemplar of the fiery race that can persevere and conquer difficulties which the native of the soil recoils from as insurmountable.

Sons of Fire! Were they not worthy of the name, these white men, when far out in midstream, while the boatmen bent and cowered over their paddles, these Englishmen looked in the face of the lightning and sat calm and unmoved while day darkened to the pitchy blackness of a starless midnight, and the thunder reverberated from hill to hill, with roar upon roar and peal upon peal, like the booming of heavy batteries, and anon crashed and rattled with a sharper, nearer sound. Blinding lightning, torrential rain, war of thunder and tempestuous waters, were all as nothing to these sons of fire. Their spirits rose amidst hurricane or thunder-storm; they

were full of life and gaiety while the cockleshell canoes were being tossed upon the short, choppy sea, like forest leaves upon a forest brook, and when every sudden gust threatened destruction. They laughed at peril, and insisted upon having the canoes out when their native followers saw danger riding on the wind and death brooding over the waters. They met the spirit of murder, and were not afraid. They lay down to sleep in the midst of an unknown wilderness, with savage beasts lurking in the darkness that surrounded their tents. They forded rivers that swarmed with crocodiles—horrible stealthy creatures, swimming deep down below the surface of the water, the placid, beautiful water, with lotus flowers sleeping in the sunlight, and scaly monsters waiting underneath in the shadow.

Panther, crocodile, tempest, fever, or sunstroke, poisoned arrows from murderous foes, were only so many varieties in the story of adventure. Through every vicissitude the ready wit and calm courage of the Englishmen rose superior to accident, discomfort, or danger; and to the native temper these wanderers from a far country, an island which they had heard of as a speck in a narrow sea, seemed men of iron with souls of fire.

Geoffrey would admit no malingering, would accept no idle pretexts for inaction or delay. His little band, picked out from the ruck of their porters, were always on the move, save in those rainy interludes which made movement impossible; and even then Geoffrey fretted and fumed, and was inclined to question the impracticability of a hunting expedition through those torrential rains.

"Did you ever hear of a fox-hunter stopping at home because of a wet day?" he asked Cecil Patrington, impatiently.

"Did you ever see such rain as this in a fox-hunting country?" retorted Patrington, pointing through an opening in the door of the hut to the sheet of falling water, which blotted out all beyond, and splashed with a thud into the pool that filled the enclosure.

The deep eaves kept the rain out of the huts, but not without occasional accident—spoilt provisions, damp gunpowder. It was a rude awakening from dreams of home to find one's bed afloat on a pond of rising waters.

Geoffrey had taken upon himself the task of providing meat for the party, Patrington's lazy, happy-go-lucky temper readily ceding that post of distinction to the new-comer. A man who had shot every species of beast that inhabits the great continent could easily surrender the privilege of finding meat-dinners along the route; so he only used his gun now and again when the humour prompted,

and for the most part smoked the pipe of peace and read Dickens in the repose of a day's halt, while Geoffrey roamed off with his Winchester rifle and his little band of obsequious dark-skins.

And now in this period of waiting there was the great inland sea to explore; those romantic shores with their wealth of animal life; those waters teeming with fish, hemmed round and guarded by the majesty of mountains whose lofty peaks and hollows no foot of man had ever trodden. There was plenty of scope for movement and adventure here, so long as the rains held off; and the three men made good use of their time, and the canoes were rarely idle, or the rowers allowed to shirk upon the favourite pretence of bad weather.

So long as there was something to be done, Geoffrey and Allan were happy; but with every interval of repose there came the familiar heartache, the longing for home-faces, the sense of disappointment and loss.

Sometimes alone by the lake, while the lamp was shining on the faces of his two friends yonder in the verandah, where they sat playing chess, alone in the awful stillness of that vast mountain gorge, the waters rippling with placid movement, only faintly flecked with whiteness here and there in the blue distance, Geoffrey's longing for that vanished face grew to an almost unendurable agony. He felt as if he could bear this anguish of severance no more. He began to calculate the length of the homeward journey. Oh, the weariness of it! for him for whose impatience the fastest express train would be too slow. He shrank appalled from the contemplation of the distance that he had put between himself and the woman he loved, the intolerable distance —thousands and thousands of miles—and the difficulties and vicissitudes of the journey; all the forces of tropical nature to contend with, dependent upon savages, subject to fevers that hinder and stop the eager feet, and lay the weary body low, a helpless log—to waste days and nights in burning agony—to awaken and find a caravan dwindled by desertion, luggage plundered, new impediments to progress.

Why had he been so mad as to come here? That was the question which he asked himself again and again in the stillness of night, when the mountain-peaks stood out in silvery whiteness and the mountain-chasms were pits of blackest shadow. Why had he, a free agent, master of his life and its golden opportunities, made himself a voluntary exile?

"What demon of revolt and impatience drove me out into the wilderness, when I ought to have followed her and refused to believe in her unkindness, and insisted upon being heard, and heard again, and rejected again, only to be accepted later? Did I not know, in my heart of hearts, that she loved me? And now she will believe no more in my love. The man who could leave her, who could try to cure himself of his passion for her—such a man is unworthy to be remembered. Some one else will appear upon the scene—that unknown rival whom no man fears or foresees till the hour sounds and he is there—some arrogant lover, utterly unlike Allan or me—who will not adore her as we have adored—who will approach her not as a slave, but as a master, who will win her in a month, in a week, with fierce swift wooing, startle and scare her into loving him, win her by a *coup de main*. That is the sort of thing that will happen. It is happening now, perhaps. While I am standing by these African waters, sick with longing for her. Is it night and moonlight in England, I wonder? Are she and her new lover walking in the old sleepy garden? No, it is winter there; they are sitting at the piano, perhaps, in the lamplight, her little hands moving about the keys—he listening and pretending to admire, knowing and caring no more about music than the coarsest of my Pagazis. Oh, it is maddening to think of how I am losing her! And I came here to cure myself of loving her. Cure! There is no cure for such a passion as mine. It grows with absence—it strengthens with time."

And now the Masika, the dreaded rainy season, began; the rain-sun burnt with a sickly oppressive heat; and over all nature there crept the deathlike silence that comes before a storm. No longer was heard the wail of the fish-eagle calling his mate, and the answering call from afar. No diver flitted, black, long, and lanky, over the waters. The big white and grey kingfisher had vanished from his perch upon the branches that overhang the lake. Even the ranæ in the sedges, noisiest of birds for the most part, were mute in anticipatory terror. Thick darkness brooded over the long line of hills on the further side of the lake; and from Ujiji nothing could be seen but a waste of livid waters touched here and there with patches of white. Then through that dreadful stillness rolled the long low muttering of the thunder, and lightning flashes, pale and sickly, pierced the overhanging pall of night-in-day—and then the tempest, in all its majesty of terror, the roar of winds and waters, the artillery of heaven pealing, crackling,

rattling, booming from yonder fortress of unseen giants, the citadel of untrodden hills.

And after the storm the rain, the ceaseless, hopeless, melancholy rain, a wall of water shutting out the world. There was nothing for it but to sit in the rough shelter of the tembe, and amuse one's self as best one might, cleaning guns and fishing-tackle, mending nets, playing cards or chess, reading, talking, disputing, execrating the enforced inaction, the deadly monotony. For Geoffrey's restless spirit that rainy season was absolute torture; and it needed all the forbearance and good nature of his companions to bear with his irritability and fretful complaining against inexorable nature.

Even Patrington, the best-tempered, most easy-going of men, was disgusted at Geoffrey's feverish impatience.

"I begin to admire the wisdom of a vulgar proverb—two's company, three's none," he said to Allan across the chess-board, as they arranged their men, sitting in the light of the wood fire, while Geoffrey lay fast asleep in his hammock after the weariness of sleepless nights. "Your friend is a very bad traveller—a fine-weather traveller, a man who must have sport and variety and progress all along the route. That kind of man isn't a pleasant companion in Central Africa. If courage and activity are essential, patience is no less needed. Your friend has plenty of pluck; but there's too much quicksilver in his veins. He exercises an extraordinary influence upon the men; but he is just the kind of fellow to quarrel with them and get murdered by them, if he were left too much to his own devices. It would need very little for them to think that fiddle of his an evil spirit, and smash it and him too. On the whole, Carew, I wish you and I were alone, for with yonder gentleman," pointing to the motionless figure under the striped rug, "I feel as if I had undertaken the care of a troublesome child, and Africa, don't you know, isn't the right place for spoilt brats."

"Geoffrey will be himself again when these beastly rains are over. He's a splendid fellow, and I know you like him."

"Like him? Of course I like him. Nobody could help liking him. He has the knack of making himself liked, loved almost. But he's a crank for all that. Allan, mark my words, that young man is a crank."

Allan's heart sank at this expression of opinion, short, sharp, decisive. He remembered what he had heard of Geoffrey's birth from the lips of Geoffrey's mother. Could one expect perfect

soundness of brain, perfect balance of mind and jndgment in a man who had entered life in a world of dreams and hallucinations?

CHAPTER XXIX.

KIGAMBO.*

THE rainy season was over. The moving wall of water was down. The travellers were no longer kept awake at night by the ceaseless roar of the rain. The lake lay stretched before them, sapphire dark under the milky blueness of the tropical sky. Kingfisher and fish-eagle, and all the birds that haunt those waters, hovered, or perched on the trees or along the bank, or skimmed the shining surface of the great fresh-water sea. And now the canoes were manned, and the three white men and their followers were setting their faces towards Manyema, the cannibal country, dreaded by Wangana and Wanyamwezis, and even by the bolder Makalolos.

For this stage of their journey they were travelling in a stronger company, having accepted the fellowship of an Arab caravan faring towards the Congo; and this larger troop gave an air of new gaiety to their train. They had been forced to buy new stores of cloth and beads at Ujiji, Geoffrey's recklessness in rewarding his men, after every successful hunting expedition, having considerably reduced their stock. The cloth bought at Ujiji was dear and bad, and Cecil Patrington took Geoffrey to task with some severity; but his reproaches fell lightly upon that volatile nature.

"Remember that the measure of the goods we carry is the measure of our lives," said the experienced traveller gravely.

"Oh, Providence will take care of us when our goods are gone," argued Geoffrey. "We shall fall in with some civilized Arabs who know the value of hard cash. I cannot believe in a country where a cheque-book is useless. We shall be within tonch of the mercantile world when we get to Stanley Pool."

"When!" echoed Patrington. "Hill and jungle, and desert and river, mutiny or desertion, pestilence and tempest, have to be accounted with before you see steamers and civilization. There's no use in glib talk of what can be done at Brazzaville or at Stanley Pool. Luckily we are going into a region where food is cheap—such as it is. But then, on the other hand, we may run out of quinine—and quinine sometimes means life."

* Kigambo: unexpected calamity, slavery, or death.

Summer was in the land when they crossed the great lake, stopping for a night or two on one of the principal islands, under the hospitable roof of a missionary station, where it was a new sensation to sit upon a chair, and taste a cup of coffee made in the European manner, and to see an Englishwoman's pleasant face and neat raiment. There was an English child also, "a real human child," as Geoffrey exclaimed, delighted at the phenomenon—a round-limbed, fat-cheeked rosy baby, who sat and watched the landing of the party from her perambulator, and patronized them with chubby hands waving a welcome, as they scrambled out of the canoes—a child who had entered upon a world of black faces, and who may have fancied her mother and father monstrosities in a place where everybody else was black.

What a contrast was this fair blue-eyed two-year-old to such infancy as they had seen in the villages along their road, the brown naked creatures rolling and grovelling in the dirt, and looking more like pug-dogs than children!

When they had bidden good-bye to the friendly missionary and his domestic circle, they were not without childish life upon their way, for the Arabs with whom they had joined company had some women in their train, one a slave with a couple of children; and as the Arab law does not recognize slavery under adult age, these brats of six and seven were free, and not being goods and chattels, no provision was allowed for them, and the mother had to feed them out of her own scanty rations.

Geoffrey was on more familiar terms with the Arabs than either Patrington or Allan, and, on discovering the state of things with the native mother and her sons, he took these two morsels of dusky humanity into his service, and set them to clean pots and pans, and treated them as a kind of lap-dogs, and let them dance to his wild fiddle music in the firelight in front of the tents, and would not allow them to be punished for their depredations among the pannikins of rice or the baskets of bananas.

They crossed the swift and turbid Luama river, encamped for a night upon its shores, and then came the harassing march in single file through the dense jungle—a hopeless monotony of rank foliage taller than the tallest of the travellers, a coarse and monstrous vegetation which lashed their faces and rent their clothing and caught their feet like wire snares set for poachers. Vain was it to put the porters with their loads in the forefront of the procession. The rank inexorable jungle closed behind them as they

passed; and a four hours' march through this pitiless scrub was worse than a ten hours' tramp in the open.

The days were sultry. The travellers deemed themselves lucky if the evening closed without a thunder-storm; and the storms in those regions were deadly. A fired roof and a blackened corpse in a hut next that occupied by the three friends testified to the awfulness of an African thunder-storm. The thatch blazed, the neighbours looked on, and the husband of the victim sat beside the disfigured form in a curious indifference, which might mean either bewilderment or want of feeling.

"Twenty years ago the catastrophe next door would have been assuredly put down to our account," said Patrington, as they sat at supper after the storm, "and we should have had to pay for that poor lady with our persons or our goods—our goods for choice, so much merikani, or so many strings of sami sami. But since the advent of the Arabs, reason has begun to prevail over unreason. The influence of Islam makes for civilization."

They found the people of Manyema, the reputed man-eaters, friendly, and willing to deal. Provisions were cheap. Fowls, eggs, maize, and sweet potatoes were to be had in abundance. The natives were civil, but curious and intrusive; and the sound of Geoffrey's Amati was the signal for a crowd round the camping-place, a crowd that could only be dispersed by the sight of a revolver, the nature of which weapon seemed very clearly understood by these warriors of the lance and the knife. When the admiring throng waxed intrusive, and the black faces and filthy figures crowded the verandah, Cecil Patrington took out his pistols, and gave them a little lecture in their native tongue, with the promise of an illustration or two if they should refuse to depart.

Or were Geoffrey in the humour, he would push his way, playing, through that savage throng, and, like the Pied Piper of Hamelin, would lead those human rats away towards hill or stream, jungle or plain, playing, playing some diabolical strain of Tartini's, or some still wilder war-song of the new Sclavonic school—Stojowski, Moszkowski, Wienianwowski—something thrilling, plaintive, frightening, appealing, which set those savage breasts on fire, and turned those savage heads like strong drink.

"One shall be taken and the other left." That text would flash across Geoffrey Wornock's thoughts at the unlikeliest moments. It might have been a fiery scroll projected on the dark cloud-line of the thunderous eventide. It might have been the sharp shrill cry

of some bird crossing the blue above his head; so unexpectedly, so strangely did the words recur to him. So far in all the vicissitudes of the journey the little band had held firmly on, with less than the average amount of suffering and inconvenience. There had been desertion, there had been death among their men; but on the Unyamwesi route it had been easy to repair all such losses, and their Wanyamwesis were in most respects the superiors of the Wangana they had lost by the way.

So far, despite of some baddish bouts of fever, the dark, inexorable Shadow had held aloof. The dread of death had not been beside their camp-fires or about their bed.

But now in this region of tropical fertility, amidst a paradise of luxuriant verdure, sheltered by the vast mountain citadel that rises like a titanic wall above the western border of the Tanganyika, they came upon a spot where the fever-fiend, the impalpable, invisible, inexorable enemy reigned supreme. Geoffrey was the first to feel the poisonous influence of the atmosphere. He laid down his fiddle, and flung himself upon his bed, with aching back and weary limbs, one evening, after a day of casual roaming along the banks of a tributary stream.

"I've been walking about too long," he said. "That's all that there is the matter with me."

"That's all!" But when daylight came, he was in the unknown fever-country, the dreadful topsy-turvy world of delirium. He had two heads, and he wanted to shoot one of them. He tried to stand up and go across the hut to fetch the rifle that hung against the opposite wall; but his limbs refused to obey him. He lay groaning, helpless as an infant, muttering that the other head wouldn't let him sleep. The pain was all in that other head. In the long agony that followed all things were blank and dark; until, after five days of raging fever, the pulse grew regular again, the scorching body cooled down to the temperature of healthy life, and weak, and wan, but rejoicing in freedom from pain, the patient came back to every-day life, and looked into the faces of his companions with eyes that saw the things that were, and not the spectral forms that people delirious dreams.

"'One shall be taken,'" he muttered to himself, as he looked from Allan to Cecil, and back again. "I thought it was I. Then we are all three of us alive?" he said, with a catch in his voice that was almost a sob.

"Very much alive, and we hope to remain so," answered Patrington, cheeriest of travellers. "You've had a bad spell of the cursed Mukurungu, which I suppose must have its fling for the next decade or two, until railroads, and hotels, and scientific drainage, and Swiss innkeepers have altered the climate for the better. You've been pretty bad, and you've kept us in a very unhealthy district, so as soon as ever you've picked up your strength, we'll move on."

"I can start to-morrow morning. I feel as strong as a lion."

"Does a lion's paw shake as your hand is shaking now? My dear Geoff, you are as weak as water. We'll give you three days to recruit. I am too hardened a subject for the Mukurungu, which is a fever of acclimatization, for the most part, and I've been dosing Allan with quinine, and I've been doing a good deal of ambulanco surgery among the natives, and we're a very popular party. They have seldom seen three white men in a bunch. Your fiddling, my medicine-chest and sticking-plaister, and Allan's good manners have made a great effect. The blackies are assured that we are all three sultans in our own country."

"And our Arab friends?"

"Oh, they have gone on. We have only our own men with us now. Your Makololos have been miserable about you."

They spent a jovial night, Geoffrey's spirits rising to wild gaiety, with that lightness which comes when a fever-patient has struggled through the thick cloud of strange fancies, the agony of throbbing brain and aching back.

He tuned the fiddle that had been lying mute in its velvet nest. He tucked it lovingly under his chin, and laid his bow along the strings with light fingers that trembled a little in the rapture of that familiar touch.

"Shall I bore you very much if I play?" he asked, looking at his elder companion.

"Bore us! Not a jot. I have sadly missed your wild strains. There has been a voice wanting—a voice that is almost human, and which seems so much a part of you that while *that* was dumb you seemed to be dead. Begin your spells. Play us something by one of your 'Owskis,—Jimowski, Bilowski, Bobowski—whichever you please."

Geoffrey drew his bow across the strings with a swelling chord, a burst of bass music like the sudden pealing of an organ, and began a Walachian dirge.

"Does that give you the scene?" he asked, pausing and looking round at them, after a tremendous presto movement. "Does it

conjure up the precipitous mountain road, the funeral train, the wild wailing of the mourners, the groaning men, the shrieking women, even the whining and whimpering of the little children, the stormy sky, the thick darkness, the flare of the torches, the trampling of the iron-shod hoofs? I can hear and see it all as I play." And then he began the slow movement, the awful ghostly adagio with its suggestion of all things horrible, its eccentric phrasing, and dissonant chords, shaping a vision of strange unearthly forms.

"It's a very jolly kind of music," Cecil Patrington said thoughtfully; "I mean jolly difficult, don't you know. But if you want my candid opinion as to what it suggests, I am free to confess it sounds to me like your improvised notion of the Mukurungu—all fever and pain and confusion."

"The Mukurungu! Not half a bad name for a descriptive sonata!" laughed Geoffrey, putting his fiddle to bed.

And then they brought out the cards, and played poker for cowries, Cecil Patrington, as usual, the winner, by reason of that inscrutable countenance of his, which had hardened itself in all the hazards of an adventurous career. They were particularly jovial that evening, and flung care to the winds that sobbed and muttered along the shore. Geoffrey's gaiety communicated itself to the other two. They drank their moderate potations; they smoked their pipes; and Patrington discoursed of an ideal settlement where the surplus population of Whitechapel and Bermondsey were to come and work in a new Arcadia, a place of flocks and herds and coffee-fields, under a smokeless heaven.

"For my own satisfaction, I would have Africa untrodden and unknown, a world of wonder and mystery," he said; "but the beginning has been made, and the coming century will see every missionary settlement of to-day develop into a populous centre of enterprise and labour. Crowded-out England will come here, and thrive here, as it has thriven in less fertile lands. Englishmen will flock here for sport and pleasure and profit."

"And these native sultans—these little kings and their peoples?"

"Ah, that is the problem! God grant there may be a bloodless solution!"

That was the last night these three travellers ever sat together over their cards and pipes, ever laughed and talked together with hearts at ease. They were to resume their journey next morning; but when all was ready for the start, Allan discovered that Cecil Patrington was too ill to walk.

"I've had a bad night," he confessed; "the kind of night that lets one know one has a head belonging to one. But the men can carry me in a litter. I shall be all right to-morrow. I'd much rather we jogged along. This is a vile, feverish hole."

There was no question of jogging along for this hardy traveller. The oppressive drowsiness, which is sometimes the first stage of malarial fever, held him like a spell. He looked at his companions dimly, with eyes that sparkled and yet were cloudy with involuntary tears. He could hardly see their anxious faces.

"I'm afraid I'm in for it," he faltered. "I thought I was fever-proof."

He sank upon the narrow camp-bed in a shivering fit, and Geoffrey and Allan spread their blankets over him. They heaped every bit of woollen covering they possessed over those shaking limbs, but could not quiet the ague fit or bring warmth to the icecold form.

Dreary days, dreadful nights, followed the sad waking of that sultry morning. The two young men nursed their guide and captain with unceasing watchfulness and devotion. Geoffrey developed a feminine tenderness and carefulness which was touching in so wild and fitful a nature. But they could do so little! And he whom they watched and cared for knew not, or only knew in rare brief intervals, of their loving care.

They tried to sustain each other's courage. They told each other that malarial fever was only a phase of African travel; an unpleasant phase, but not to be avoided. They knew all about the fever from bitter experience; and here was Geoffrey but just recovered, and doubtless Patrington would mend in a day or two, as he had mended.

"I don't suppose he's any worse than I was," said Geoffrey.

Allan shook his head sadly.

"I don't know that he's worse, but the symptoms seem different somehow. He doesn't answer to the medicines as you did."

The symptoms developed unmistakably after this, and the fever showed itself as typhus in the most deadly form. Swift on this revelation came the end; and in the solemn stillness of the forest midnight they knelt beside the unconscious form and watched the parched, quivering lips from which the breath was faintly ebbing. One last sobbing sigh, and between them and the captain of their little company there stretched a distance wider than the breadth of Africa, further than from the Zambesi to the Congo. A land more mysterious than the Dark Continent parted them from him who

was last week their jovial, hardy comrade, sharing the fortunes of the day, thinking of death as of a shadowy something waiting for him far off, at the end of innumerable journeys and long years of adventurous activity—a quiet haven, into which his bark would drift when the timbers were worn thin with long usage, and the arms of the rower were weary of plying the oar.

And death was close beside them all the time, lying in wait for that gallant spirit, like a beast of prey.

"O God, is there another Africa, where we shall meet that brave, good man again?" cried Allan. "Which of our modern teachers is right?—Liddon, who tells us that Christ rose from the dead; or Clifford, who tells us there is nothing—nothing, no Great Companion, no Master or Guide: only ourselves and our faithful service for one another—only this poor humanity?"

He looked up appealingly, expecting to see Geoffrey's face on the other side of the bed; but he was alone. Geoffrey had fled from the presence of death. He had rushed out into the wilderness. It was late in the following afternoon when he came back. The men had dug a grave under a great sycamore, and Allan was about to read the funeral service, when Geoffrey reappeared.

White, haggard, with wild eyes, and clothes stained with mire and sedge, the red clay of the forest paths, the green slime of swamp and bog, Allan could only look at him in pitying wonder.

"Where in Heaven's name have you been?" he asked, looking up from the rough basket-work coffin—bamboo and bulrush—interwoven by native hands.

"I don't know. Out yonder, between the plain and the river. I was a craven to fly from the face of death—I, a soldier," with a short, ironical laugh. "I don't know how it was with me last night. I couldn't bear it. I had been thinking of that verse in the gospel—'One shall be taken,' but I didn't think it would be that one—the hardy, experienced traveller. It might have been you or I. Not he, Allan. It was a blow, wasn't it?—a blow that might shake a strong man's nerves!"

Allan stretched out his hand to his comrade in silence, and they clasped hands, heartily on Allan's part; and his grip was so earnest that he did not know it clasped a nerveless hand.

"It was a crushing blow," he said gravely. "I don't blame you for being scared. You have come back in time to see him laid in his grave, and to say a prayer with me."

Geoffrey shrugged his shoulders, with a hopeless look.

"Where do our prayers go, I wonder? We know no more than the natives, when they sacrifice to their gods. Isn't it rather feeble to go on praying when there never comes any answer? I saw you praying last night—wrestling with God in prayer, as pious people call it. I saw your forehead damp with agony, your lips writhing—every vein in your clasped hands standing out like whipcord. I watched you, and was sorry, and would have given ten years of my life to save his; but I couldn't pray with you. And, you see, there came no answer. Inexorable Nature worked out her own problem in her own way. Your prayers—my silence; one was as much use as the other. Nobody heeded us; nobody cared for us. The stroke fell."

"Ah, we know not, we know not! There *is* compensation, perhaps. We shall see and know our friends in heaven, and look back and know that we were children groping in the dark. Try to believe, Geoffrey. Belief is best."

"Belief. The universal anodyne, the Christian's patent pain-killer. Yes, belief is best; but, you see, some people can't believe. I can't. And I see only the hideous side of death—the dull horror of annihilation. A week ago we had a man with us, the manliest of men—all nerve, and fire, and brain-power, brave as a lion, ready to do and endure—and now we have only—that," with a look of heart-sickness, "which we are impatient to put out of sight for ever. Put it in the ground, Allan; fill in the grave; trample it down; let us forget that there was ever such a man."

He flung himself upon the ground and sobbed out his grief. There had been something in the blunt, dogged straightforwardness of Cecil Patrington's character which had attached this wayward nature to him with hooks of steel.

"I loved him," he muttered, getting up, calm and grave even to sullenness. "And now you and I are alone."

He stood beside the grave where native hands had gently lowered the rough coffin, and where Allan had scattered flowers and herbs, whose aromatic odours hung heavy on the still sultriness of the atmosphere. He looked at Allan, and not with looks of love.

"Only we two," he muttered, "and these black beasts of burden."

CHAPTER XXX.

MAMBU KWA MUNGU.*

One had been taken. That which seemed to Geoffrey Wornock inevitable in the history of African travel had been accomplished. The Dark Continent had claimed its tribute of human life. Africa had chosen her victim. Not the expected sacrifice. She had chosen her prey in him who had dared the worst she could do—not in one pilgrimage, but in long years of travel—who had looked her full in the face and laughed at her dangers, and had wooed her with a masterful spirit, telling her that she was fair, stepping with light, careless foot over her traps and pitfalls, lying down within sound of her lions, drenched with her torrential rains, tossed on her chopping seas, blinded with the fierce glare of her lightnings—always her lover, her master, her champion.

"There is no land like Africa. There is nothing in life so good as the wild, free day of the wanderer," he had said again and again. And now he had paid for his love with his life. He had laid himself down, like Mark Antony at the foot of his dead mistress.

He was gone, and the two young men were alone in the wide wilderness, among the mountain paths between the great lake and the far-off western sea; and in long pauses of melancholy silence by the camp-fire, or in the sunlit verandah, Geoffrey looked into the face that was like and yet not like his own, and thought of the woman they both loved, and of that duel to the death which there must needs be when two men have built all their hopes of happiness upon the love of one woman. A duel of deadly thought, if not of deadly weapons.

"If we go back, it will be to fight for her love," he thought, "to fight as the wild stags in the mountains fight for the chosen hind—forehead to forehead, forefeet planted like iron, antlers locked, clashing with a sound that is heard afar off. Yes, we shall fight for her. The battle will have to begin again. We shall hate each other."

Wakeful and unquiet in the deep, dead silence of the tropical night, he would sit outside hut or tent, mending the fire, looking listlessly at the ring of sleeping porters, listening mechanically for the qua-qua of the night-heron, or the grunt of the hippopotamus coming up from the river. The loss of Patrington's cheery com-

* Mambu kwa mungu: It is God's trouble.

panionship had wrought a dark change in Geoffrey's mind and feelings. While Patrington was with them, there had been ever-recurring distractions from dark brooding on the inner self. Patrington was eminently a man of action, practical, matter-of-fact; and love-sick dreaming was hardly possible in his company. He was as energetic in conversation as in action, would argue, and philosophize, and quote his master of fiction, and dose them with Pickwick and Weller as he dosed them with quinine.

He was gone; and in the deep melancholy that had fallen upon the travellers after the sudden shock of bereavement, Geoffrey's thoughts dwelt with a maddening iteration upon one absorbing theme.

They had left the poor village of bee-hive huts, near which their comrade lay at rest under the great sycamore. They had travelled slowly, ten miles in a day at most, uphill and downhill, by jungle and swamp, too depressed for any strenuous effort, Geoffrey still weak after his attack of fever, and harassed with rheumatic aches after his night of reckless wandering in marsh and wilderness, in peril of being devoured by the panthers that abound in that region. They were not more than fifty miles from the great lake, and now they were delayed again by the illness of some of their porters, and perhaps also by their own listlessness—the hopeless inertia that follows a great sorrow, a state of mind in which it seems not worth while to make any effort.

They had lost their captain and guide; but they had their plans all laid down—plans discussed again and again during the rains at Ujiji. After a good deal of talk about going south to Nyassa, and back to the east coast by the Zambesi-Shire route, they had finally decided on following Trivier's route to Stanley Pool, and there to wait for the steamer. The idea of crossing the great continent from east to west pleased the younger travellers better than that notion of doubling back to the more civilized region, the Arcadia of Nyassaland, a place of Christian missions, and flocks, and herds, and prosperous homesteads, and frequent steamers.

But now life in the desert had lost its savour, and Allan and Geoffrey looked over their rough sketch-maps dully, and wished that the journey were done.

"Wouldn't it be better to turn back and take the easiest route, by Nyassa and the Shire?" Allan asked despondently.

"No, no; we must see the Congo. What should we do if we went back to England? Have either you or I anything that calls us back to civilization and its deadly monotony?" Geoffrey asked, watching his companion's face with eager eyes.

"No, there is very little. My mother would be glad to see me back again. It seems hard to desert her now she is left alone. And Mrs. Wornock—her life is just as solitary—she must long for your return."

"Oh, she is accustomed to my rambling propensities. Yes, Lady Emily would be glad, no doubt; and my mother would be glad; but at our age men don't go back to their mothers. If you have no one else to think about—if there is no other attraction?"

"You know there is no one else," Allan answered with a sigh.

The Amati was not silent in those dreary evenings, amidst the smoke of the fire that rose up towards the rough roof of the hut, where the lizards disported themselves among the rafters and rejoiced in the warmth. The voice of the fiddle was as lugubrious as the wailings of the native women for their dead. Funeral marches; Beethoven, Chopin, Berlioz, all that music knows of sadness and lamentation, were Geoffrey's themes in that solitude of two. The music itself had an unearthly sound; and the face of the player, sharpened and wasted by illness and by grief, had an unearthly look as the firelight flashed upon it, or the shadows darkened it.

While those lonely days wore on, Allan began to have a curious feeling about his companion, the consciousness of a gulf that was gradually widening between them; a something sinister, indefinite, indescribable. It would be too much to say that he felt he was with an enemy; but he felt that he was in the presence of the unknown.

He woke one night, turning wearily on his Arab bed—the mat spread on the ground, which use had taught him almost to like. He woke and saw Geoffrey sitting up on his mat on the other side of the hut, his back against the wall, his eyes looking straight at Allan with an inscrutable expression. Was it dislike or was it fear that looked out of those widely opened eyes? Why fear?

"What's the matter?" Allan asked quickly. "Have you just awakened from a bad dream?"

"No. Life is my bad dream; and there is no awakening from that, only the change to dreamless sleep."

"What were you thinking about, then?"

"Life and death, and love and hate, and all things sad and strange and cruel. Do you remember Livingstone's description of a Bechuana chieftain's burial? His people dig a grave in his cattle-pen, and bury him there; and then they drive the cattle round and over the spot till every trace of the newly filled-in grave is obliterated. We are not as candid as the Bechuana men. We

put up a statue of our great man—or, at least, we talk about a statue; but in six months he is as much forgotten as if the cattle had pranced and trampled over his body."

"Primrose Day belies your cynicism."

"Primrose Day! A fashion as much as the November bonfire. Of all the people who wear the Beaconsfield badge three-fourths could not tell you who Beaconsfield was, or how much or how little he did for England."

"Do you remember something else in Livingstone's book, how the tribes who met him said, 'Give us sleep'? It was their prayer to the possible wonder-worker. Give me sleep, Geoff. I'm dead beat."

"Why, we did nothing yesterday; a beggarly eight miles."

"Perhaps it was the thunder-storm that took it out of me."

"Well, sleep away. The tribes were right. There is no better gift. Would it help you if I played a little, very softly? I have a devil to-night which only music will cast out."

"Yes, play, but don't be too lugubrious. My heart is one great ache."

Without moving from his mat, Geoffrey stretched a thin hand towards the fiddle-case that lay beside his pillow, opened it noiselessly and took out the Amati; then, with his haggard eyes still fixed on the reclining figure opposite him, he drew a long sobbing chord out of the strings, and began a nocturne of Chopin's, delicatest melody played with exquisite delicacy, the very music of sleep and dreams.

"I am talking to her," he murmured to himself softly; "across the great continent, across the great sea, over burning desert and tropical wilderness, my voice is calling to her. I am telling her the story of my heart, as I used to tell her in the dear days at Discombe, the dear unheeding days, when my bow talked to her half in sport, when I hardly knew if the wild thrill that ran along my veins meant a lifelong love."

The music served as a lullaby for Allan, and it soothed Geoffrey, whose brain had been overcharged with hideous fancies, as he sat up in his bed, listening to the ticking of the watch that hung against the wall, and looking at his slumbering companion.

Darkest thoughts, thoughts of what might happen if this throbbing brain of his were to lose its balance. He had been thinking of the narrow wall between reason and unreason, and of the madness that may come out of one absorbing idea. Where did a passionate love like his end and monomania begin? Was it well that they two should be alone together, with only these black beasts of burden?

He thought of one of the men, a grinning good-natured-looking animal, the best of their porters, of whom it was told that setting out on a journey with one of his wives he arrived at his destination without her. It might have been his honeymoon. He explained that wild beasts had eaten the lady; but it was known afterwards that he had killed her and chopped her up on the way. Anger, jealousy, convenience? Who knows? The man was a good servant, and nobody cared about this episode in his career.

Was murder so easy, then? Easy to do, easy to forget?

A great horror came over him at thought of the deeds that had been done in the world by men of natures like his own; by despairing lovers, by jealous husbands, by men over whose ill-balanced minds one idea obtained the mastery. And, under the dominion of such ghastly fancies, he looked forward to the journey they two were to make, a journey that, all told, was likely to last the greater part of a year. Alone together, seeing each other's faces day after day, each thinking the same thoughts, and not daring to speak those thoughts; each with fonder and more passionate yearning as the time drew nearer when they should meet the woman they loved; each knowing that happiness for one must mean misery for the other. Friends in outward seeming, rivals and foes at heart, they were to go on journeying side by side, day after day, lying down beside the same fire night after night, waking in the darkness to hear each other's breathing, and to know that a loaded rifle lay within reach of their hands, and that a bullet would end all their difficulties.

It was horrible.

"I was an idiot to undertake the impossible, to believe that I could be happy and at ease with this man. If I were to go home alone, she would have me," he told himself. "It was only for Allan's sake she hung back. So tender, so over-scrupulous, lest she should pain the lover she had jilted."

If he were to go home alone! Was not that possible without the suggestion of darkest iniquity? If he could go home, and gain, say half a year, before his rival reappeared upon the scene, would not that half-year suffice for the winning of his bride?

"If she loved me as I think she loved me, and if she is as noble of nature as I believe her to be, two years of sevorance will have tried and strengthened her love. She will love me all the dearer for my wanderings. And if Allan is not there to remind her of his wrongs, to appeal to her too-scrupulous conscience, I shall win her."

To go back alone, to divide their resources, to divide their followers, and each to set out on his own way. Useless such a parting as that; for Allan might be the first to tread on English soil, the first to clasp Suzette's hands in the gladness of friends who meet after long absence.

"If he were to be the first, she might deceive herself in the joy of seeing a familiar face, and think she loved him, and give him back her promise in a fit of penitent affection. There are such nice shades in love. She must have had a certain fondness for him. It might revive were I not there—revive and seem enough for happiness. I must be first! I must be first, and alone in the field."

He hated himself for the restless impatience which had made him join fortunes with Allan. What had he to do with the rejected lover, he who knew that he was loved?

They crept slowly on. Allan was ailing, and unable to stand the fatigue of a long march through a close and difficult country. That week of watching beside Patrington's sick-bed, and the agony of losing that kindly comrade, had shattered his nerves and reduced his physical strength almost as much as an actual illness could have reduced him. He felt the depressing influence of the climate as the days grew more sultry and the thunder-storms more frequent. All the spirit and all the pleasure seemed to have vanished out of the expedition since the digging of that grave under the sycamore.

Their day's journey dwindled and their halts grew longer. At the rate they were now travelling it would take them a year to reach the Falls. They had left Ujiji more than a month, and they were still a long way to the east of Kassongo, the busy centre of Arab commerce and population, where they could make any purchases they wanted, refit for the rest of their journey, or, perhaps, make a contract with the mighty Tippoo, who would provide them with men and food till the end of the land journey for a lump sum. While Patrington lived they had looked forward to the halt at Kassongo with keen interest; but now zest and pleasurable curiosity were gone, and a dull lassitude weighed like an actual burden upon both travellers. Both were alike spiritless; and even Geoffrey's raids in quest of meat were neither so frequent nor so far afield as they had been, and his men began to lose something of their admiration for him. He was growing over-fond of that kri-kri of his, over-fond of sitting in the verandah talking with that curious, tricksy spirit, now drawing forth sobbing cries like

funeral dirges, now with frisking, flickering touch that danced and flashed across the strings, with hand as rapid as light, with fingers that flew, and eyes that flashed fire.

These wild dances were grasshoppers, he told them; and when he began the wailing music that thrilled and pained them, his Makololos would lie down at his feet and entreat him to change it to a grasshopper.

"We hate him when he cries," they said of the fiddle. "We love him when he leaps and dances."

"And you would follow him and me anywhere across the land?" Geoffrey asked, laughing down at the brown faces.

"Anywhere, if you promise us your guns at the end of the journey."

Two days later Allan succumbed to the feeling of prostration which had been growing upon him during the last four or five stages of the journey, and confessed himself unable to start.

It was in the freshness of dawn. The mists were creeping off the manioc fields, and the wide stretches of tropical foliage beyond the patch of rude cultivation. The brown figures were moving about in the pearly light, women fetching water, children sprawling on the rich red earth, their plump shining bodies only a little browner than the soil, happy in their nakedness and dirt, placid and unashamed. The porters were shouldering their loads, the lean, long-legged mongrels were yelping, the frogs croaking their morning hymn to the sun.

"I'm afraid it's hopeless," Allan faltered, as he leant against one of the rough supports of the verandah, wiping the moisture from his forehead. "I'm dead beat. I can't go on unless you carry me in a litter; and that's hardly worth while with our small following. You'd better go on to Kassongo, Geoff, and leave me here till I'm able to follow. If I don't turn up within a few days of your arrival, you can get the chief to send some of his men to me, with a donkey, if there's one to be had. The villagers will take care of me in the meantime. It isn't fever, you see," holding out his cold moist hand to his friend. "It's not the Mukunguru this time. I'm just dead beat, that's all. There's no good fighting against hard fact, Geoff. *Mambu kwa mungu*—it is God's trouble! One must submit to the inevitable."

Geoffrey looked at him curiously.

"Leave you to these savages in the Manyema country? No; that would be a beastly thing to do," he said, with his cynical laugh. "I'm not quite bad enough for that, Allan. How do I know

they wouldn't eat you? They've been civil enough so far, but I believe it's because of my fiddle. They take me for a medicine-man, and my little Amati for a capricious devil that can give them toko if they don't act on the square. I won't leave you—like that; but I'll tell you what I'll do. We'll divide forces for a bit. I'll leave you the larger party, and I and my Makololos will go and look for big game."

Allan crept into the hut and sank down upon his mat while his comrade was talking. He had hardly strength to answer him. He lay there white and dumb, while Geoffrey spread the blanket over him, and wiped his forehead with a silk handkerchief.

"Do what you like, Geoff," he murmured, "and do the best for yourself. I don't want to spoil your sport."

He turned his body towards the wall, with an obvious effort, as if his limbs were made of lead, and presently sank into a sleep which seemed almost stupor.

"My God!" muttered Geoffrey, looking down at him, "is he going to die? Can death come like that, as if in answer to a wicked wish?"

He went out and talked to the men, giving them stringent orders as to what they were to do for the sick Musungu. He was going on a shooting expedition with only four men—the rest, a round dozen, would remain with the other Musungu, and nurse him, and take care of him, and obey his orders when he was well enough to move; and, above all, not attempt robbery or desertion, as they—the two Musungus—had letters from the Sultan of Zanzibar to Nzigue, the Arab chief at Kassongo, and any evil treatment would be bitterly expiated. "You know how small account the white Arabs make of a black man's life," he concluded.

Yes, they knew.

He went back to the hut, and to the store of quinine and other drugs, and he prepared such doses as it would be well for Allan to take at fixed periods; and then he instructed the leader of the porters—a Zanzibari, who had been with Burton, and afterwards with Stanley—as to the treatment of the sick man. He was to do this, and this, once, twice, thrice, between sunrise and sundown, the division of the day by hours not having yet been revealed to these primitive minds.

"Say, how often are you hungry in the day, and how often do you eat?"

"Three times."

"Then every time you are hungry, and before you sit down to eat, you will give the Musungu his medicine—one of the powders, as I put them ready for you—mixed with water, as he has often given them to you. And if you forget, or don't care to give him his medicine, evil will come to you—for I shall put a spell upon the door, and wicked spirits will hurt you if you don't obey me."

After this he called his Makololos and one of the Wanyamwesis, for whom he had shown a liking, and who worshipped him with a slavish subjugation of all personal will-power. He told them he was going on a hunting expedition that might last many days—and they must take baggage enough to assure themselves against being left to starve upon the way. He counted the bales of cloth, the bags of beads, brass-headed nails, brass wire; and he set apart about a fourth of the whole stock; and with these stores he loaded his men. And so in the full blaze of the morning sun this little company went out into the jungle, turning their faces eastward, towards the mountains that rose between them and the sea of Ujiji.

CHAPTER XXXI.

WHERE THE BURDEN IS HEAVIEST.

THE deep-toned organ pealed through the empty manor-house in the gloom of a rainy summer afternoon. Not once in the long dull day had the sun looked through the low, dull sky; and Mrs. Wornock, always peculiarly sensible of every change in the atmosphere, felt that life was just a little sadder and emptier than it had been for her in all the long slow years of a lonely widowhood.

What had she to live for? The brief romance of her girlhood was all she had ever known of the love which for most women means a life history. For her it had been only the beginning of a chapter—ending in self-sacrifice, as blind and piteously faithful to duty as Abraham's obedience to the Divine command. And after all those years of fond fidelity to a memory, she had seen her lover again—once for a few minutes—by stealth, through an open window, undreamt of by him.

What had she to live for? A son whose restless spirit would not allow him to be her companion and friend—in whose feverish life she was of so little value that he could leave her for a pilgrimage to Central Africa, with a brief good-bye; as if it were a small thing

for mother and son to live with half the world between them. It seemed to her sometimes, brooding upon the past year, that Allan Carew had cared for her more, was more in sympathy with her, than that very son—as if some hereditary sentiment, some mystic link with the father who had loved her, brought the son nearer to her heart.

And now they were both so distant that she thought of them almost as mournfully as if they were dead. Dark clouds of trouble hung over their forms, as she tried to see them in that far-off world, ever impending dangers which haunted her in her dreams, until the words of St. Paul burnt themselves into her brain, and she would awake from some wild shapeless dream of horror, hearing her own voice, with that awful sound of the dreamer's voice, repeating—

"In journeyings . in perils of waters, in perils of robbers . in perils by the heathen . in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea . in weariness and painfulness . in hunger and thirst."

Suzette had been absent for nearly a year, and Suzette's absence had increased the sense of loss and deepened the gloom of the rambling old house, and those primly picturesque gardens, where the girl's bright face and graceful figure flitting in and out from arch to arch, between the walls of ilex or yew, had been a living gladness that seemed only a natural accompaniment to spring flowers, sulphur butterflies, and the deepening purple of the beeches, in the joyous awakening of the year. But Suzette had returned from her travels nearly a year since, and had taken up the thread of life again, and with it her old friendship for Mrs. Wornock, feeling herself secure from the risk of all violent emotions in her friend's house, now that Geoffrey was a good many thousand miles away.

Suzette had brought comfort to the lonely life. Together she and Mrs. Wornock had read books of African travel, explored maps, and followed the route of the travellers. General Vincent was a fellow of the Geographical Society, and the monthly report issued by that society kept his daughter informed of the latest progress in the history of exploration, while the society's library was at her disposal for books of travel. It seemed to Suzette in that quiet year after her home-coming that she read nothing but African books, and began almost to think in the Swahili language —picking up words in every chapter, till they became as familiar as French phrases in a society novel.

She was quieter than of old, people said: less interested in golf:

caring nothing for a church bazaar which was the one absorbing topic in that particular summer; wrapped up in her musical studies, and practising a great deal too much, as officious friends informed General Vincent.

"Suzette must do what she likes," he said; "she has always been my master."

But egged on by the same officious friends, he bought his daughter a horse, and insisted on her riding with him, and they went for long rides over the downs, and sometimes were lucky enough to fall in with the hawks, and see a few innocent rooks slaughtered high up in the blue of an April sky.

He shrank from questioning his daughter about the young men who were gone. She had been very ill—languid, and white, and wan, and spiritless—when he carried her off to Germany, and had required a good deal of patching up before she became anything like the happy, active, high-spirited Suzette of the Indian hills—who had charmed everybody, old and young, by her bright prettiness and joy in life. German waters, German woods and hills, followed by a winter on the Riviera, and a long holiday by the Italian lakes, had set her up again; and General Vincent was content to wait till time should unravel the mystery of a maiden's heart.

"Those young men will come back," he told his sister; "and then I shouldn't wonder if Geoffrey were to renew his offer—and to be accepted; for since she gave Allan the sack without any provocation, I conclude it's Geoffrey she cares for."

"I wash my hands of her and her love affairs," Mrs. Mornington retorted waspishly. "She might have married Allan—a young man who adored her—and a very good match. *Very* good now his father's gone. She jilted Allan—one would suppose solely because she was in love with Geoffrey. Oh dear no! She refuses Geoffrey, and sends two excellent young men—each an only son, with a stake in the country—to bake themselves black in a wilderness where they will very likely be eaten after they are baked. I have no patience with her."

"Don't be cross, Molly. There's no use worrying about her lovers. Thank God she has recovered her health, and is my own sweet little girl still."

"Sweet little fiddlestick, coquette, weathercock, jilt! That's what she is."

"Take my word for it. Wornock will come back again when he's tired of Africa—and propose again."

"Not if he has a grain of sense. Young men don't come back to girls who treat them badly."

The General took things easily. He had his daughter, and his daughter would be comfortably provided for when his day was done. He was more than content with the present arrangement of things; and he felt that Providence had been very good to him.

Suzette came in upon Mrs. Wornock's loneliness that rainy afternoon like a sudden burst of sunlight; so fresh, after her walk through the rain, so daintily neat in the pretty blue-and-white pongee frock which her waterproof cloak had preserved from all harm.

"I did not think you would come to-day, dear!"

"Did you think the rain would frighten me? The walk was lovely in spite of a persistent drizzle, the woods are so fresh and sweet, and every little insignificant wild-flower sparkles like a jewel. I have a tiny bit of news for you."

"Not bad news?"

"No, I hope not. Lady Emily is at Beechhurst. She came late last night. The cook at the Vicarage saw her arrive, and Bessie Edgefield told me this morning. Do you think it means that Allan is expected home?"

"And Geoffrey with him? Would to God it meant that! I am getting very weary, Suzette, weary to death. My anxiety is like a wearing, physical pain. It is so long since we have heard anything of them."

"Yes, it seems very long!" Suzette murmured, soothingly.

"It *is* very long—quite four months since I had Geoffrey's last letter!"

"Do you think it is really as much as that?"

"I know it is—and there is the post-mark to convince you," glancing at the secretaire where she kept those treasured letters. "Geoffrey seldom dates a letter. I have read that last one again and again and again. They were at Ujiji—the place seemed almost civilized, as he described it; but they were to cross the lake later on—the great lake, like an inland sea—to cross in an open boat. How do I know that they were not drowned in that crossing? He told me the natives were afraid of going on the lake in a storm. And he is so foolhardy, so careless of himself! He may have over-persuaded them——"

"Hark!" cried Suzette, "a visitor! What a day for callers to choose! They must really wish to find you at home."

There was the usual delay caused by the leisurely stroll of a footman from the servants' quarters to the hall-door, and then the door of the music-room was opened, and the leisurely footman announced Lady Emily Carew.

Lady Emily shook hands with Mrs. Wornock, with a clinging, almost affectionate air, and allowed herself to be led to an easy-chair near the hearth where some logs were burning, to give a semblance of cheerfulness amidst the prevailing grey of the outside world. There was a marked contrast in the lady's greeting of Suzette, to whom she vouchsafed no handshake, only the most formal salutation. The mother of an only son, whom she deems perfection, cannot easily forgive the girl who goes near to breaking his heart.

"I was so surprised to hear you were at Beechhurst," said Mrs. Wornock. "I hope you bring good news—that the travellers are nearing home."

Lady Emily could hardly answer for her tears.

"Indeed, no," she said piteously. "My news is very bad; I could not rest at home. I thought you might have heard lately from Mr. Wornock——"

"My latest letter is four months old."

"Ah, then you can tell me nothing. Allan has written later. He wrote the night before they left Ujiji——"

"But the news—the bad news? What was it?"

"Very, very bad. They are alone now—our sons—alone among savages—in an unknown country—friendless, helpless. What is to become of them?"

"But Mr. Patrington—surely he has not deserted them?"

"No, no, poor fellow; he would never have deserted them. He is dead. He died of fever. The news of his death was cabled to his brother by Allan. The message came from Zanzibar; but he died on his way from the Lake to Kassongo. That was Allan's message. Died of fever on the journey to Kassongo. Allan's last letter was from Ujiji. They were all well when he wrote, and in good spirits, looking forward to the journey down the Congo; and now their leader is dead, the man who knew the country; and they are alone, helpless, and ignorant."

"They are men," Suzette flashed out indignantly, her eyes sparkling with tears. "They will fight their way through difficulties like men of courage and resource. I don't think you need be frightened, Mrs. Wornock; nor you, Lady Emily."

"It is very good of you to console me, Miss Vincent," replied

Allan's mother; "but if you had known your mind a little better, my son need never have gone to Africa."

"I am sorry you should think me so much to blame; but what would you have thought of me if I had not told Allan the truth?"

"Well, you have sent him away—and he is dead, perhaps—dead in the wilderness—of fever, like poor Cecil Patrington."

Suzette bowed her head, and was silent under this reproof. She could feel for the mother, and was content to bear unmerited blame. She went to the organ, and occupied herself in putting away the scattered sheets of music, with that deft neatness which, in her case, was an instinct.

The two mothers sat side by side, and talked and wept together. They could but speculate upon the condition and the whereabouts of the wanderers. Those few words from Zanzibar told them so little. Cecil Patrington's elder brother had written to Lady Emily enclosing a copy of the message, with a polite hope that her son would find his way safely home. There was no passionate grief among his relations at home, for the wanderer who lay in his final halting-place under the great sycamore. Long years of absence had weakened family ties; and the head of the house of Patrington was a busy country squire, with an increasing family and a diminishing rent-roll.

Suzette put on her hat and wished Mrs. Wornock good-bye. She would have left with only a little bend of the head to Lady Emily; but that kindly matron had repented herself of her harshness, and held out her hand with a pathetic look which went straight to the girl's heart.

"Forgive me for what I said just now," she pleaded. "I am almost beside myself with anxiety. You were not to blame. Truth is always the best. But my poor Allan was so fond of you, and you and he might have been so happy—if you had only loved him."

"I did love him—once," faltered Suzette. "But later it seemed as if my love were not enough—not enough for a lifetime."

"Ah, but there was some one else—we know, Mrs. Wornock—some one who is like my poor son, but cleverer, handsomer, more fascinating. It was Mr. Wornock's return that changed you——"

"No, no, no!" Suzette protested eagerly. "If it had been, I might have acted differently. Please don't talk about me and my folly—not to know myself or my own heart. They are both away. God grant they are well and happy, and enjoying the beauty and the strangeness of that wonderful country. Why should they not

be safe and happy there? Think how many years Mr. Patrington had spent in Africa before the end came. Why should they not be as safe as Cameron, Stanley, Trivier?"

Her heart sank even as she argued in this consoling strain, remembering how with Stanley, with Cameron, with Trivier there was one left behind. But here, perhaps, the Fates were already appeased. One had fallen by the way. The sacrifice had been made to the cruel goddess of the dark land.

"Will you, come to Beechhurst with me, Suzette?" pleaded Allan's mother. "It would be so kind if you would come and stay with me till to-morrow morning. I shall leave by the first train to-morrow. I want to be at home again, to be there when Allan's letter comes. There must be a letter soon. It is so lonely at Beechhurst. I think General Vincent could spare you for just one night?"

Suzette proposed that Lady Emily should dine at Marsh House; but she seemed to take a morbid pleasure in her son's house in spite of its loneliness, so Suzette drove back to Matcham with her, took her to tea with the General, and obtained his permission to dine and sleep at Beechhurst, and did all that could be done by unobtrusive kindness and attention to console and cheer Allan's mother.

CHAPTER XXXII.

ALL IN HONOUR.

It was nearly a month after Lady Emily's appearance at Discombe, and there had been no letter from Geoffrey. Every day had increased Mrs. Wornock's anxiety, and in the face of an ever-growing fear there had been a tacit avoidance of all mention of the absent son, both on the part of his mother and of Suzette. They had talked of music, of the gardens, of the poor, and of the latest developments in that science of the supernatural in which Mrs. Wornock's interest had never abated, and in which her faith had never been entirely shaken.

Once, in the midst of discussing the last number of the *Psychical Magazine* with Suzette—a sad sceptic—she said quietly—

"Whatever has happened, I know he is not dead. I must have seen him. I must have known. There would have been some sign."

Suzette was silent. Not for worlds would she have dashed a

faith which buoyed up the fainting spirit. Yet it needed but some dreadful dream, she reflected, a dead face seen amidst the clouds of sleep, to change this blind confidence into despair.

It was in the evening following this conversation that Suzette was sitting at her piano alone in her own drawing-room, playing from memory, and losing herself in the web of a Hungarian nocturne, which was to her like thinking in music—the composer's learned sequences and changes of key seeming only a vague expression of her own sadness. Her father was dining out—a man's dinner—a dissipation he rarely allowed himself; and Suzette was relieved from her evening task of playing chess, reading aloud, or listening to tiger-stories, which had lost none of their interest from familiarity, the fondly loved father being the hero of every adventure.

She was glad to be alone to-night, for her heart was full of dread of the news which the next African letter might bring. She had tried to make light of the leader's death; yet she, too, thought with a shudder of the two young men alone, inexperienced, and one of them, at least, reckless and daring even to folly.

That wailing Hungarian reverie with its minor modulations seemed to shape itself into a dream of Africa, the endless jungle, the vastness of swamp and river, the beauty and the terror of gigantic waterfalls, huge walls of water, a river leaping over a precipice into a gulf of darkness and snow-white foam. The scenes of which she had been reading lately crowded into her mind, and filled it with aching fears.

"Suzette!"

A voice called to her softly from the open window. She looked up, trembling and cold with an awful fear. His voice—Geoffrey's—a spectral voice; the voice of a ghost calling to her, the unbeliever, from the other side of the world—calling in death, or after death, to the woman the living man had loved.

She rose, with a faint scream, and rushed to the window, and was clasped in the living Geoffrey's arms, on the threshold, between the garden and the room. Had she flung herself into his arms in her fear and great surprise? or had he seized her as she ran to him? She could not tell. She knew only that she was sobbing on his breast, clasped in two gaunt arms, which held her as in a grasp of iron.

"Geoffrey, Geoffrey! Alive and well! What delight for your poor mother! Was she not wild with happiness?" she asked, when he released her, after a shower of kisses upon forehead and lips, which she pretended to ignore.

She could not begin quarrelling with him in these first moments of delighted surprise.

He followed her into the room, and she saw his face in the light of the lamp on the piano—worn, wan, haggard, wasted, but with eyes that were full of fire and gladness.

"Suzette, Suzette!" he cried, clasping her hands, and trying to draw her to his heart again, "it was worth a journey over half the world to find you! So sweet, so fair! All that my dreams have shown me, night after night, night after night! Ah, love, we have never been parted. Your image has never left me."

"Africa has done you no good. You are as full of wild nonsense as ever," she said, trying to take the situation lightly, yet trembling with emotion, her heart beating loud and fast, her eyes hardly daring to meet the eyes that dwelt upon her face so fondly. "Tell me about your mother. Was she not surprised—happy?"

"I hope she will be a little glad. I haven't seen her yet."

"Not seen—your mother?"

"No, child. A man can't have two lode-stars. I came straight from Zanzibar to this house. I came home to *you*, Suzette."

"But you will go to the Manor directly? Your poor mother has been so miserable about you. Don't lose a minute in making her happy."

"Lose! These minutes are gold; the most precious minutes of my life. Oh, Suzette, how cruel you were! Why did you drive me from you?"

She was in his arms again, held closely in those wasted arms, caught in the coils of that passionate love, she scarcely knew how. He was taking everything for granted; and she knew not how to resist him. She had no argument to offer against that triumphant love.

"Cruel, cruel, cruel, Suzette! Two years of exile—two wasted lonely years—years of fond longing and looking back! Why did you send me away? No, I won't ask. It was all in honour, all in honour. My dearest is made up of honourable scruples, and delicate sympathies, which this rough nature of mine can't understand. But you loved me, Suzette. You loved me from the first, as I loved you. Our hearts went out to meet each other over the bridge of my violin—flew out to each other in a burst of melody. And we will go on loving each other till the last breath—the last faint glimmer of life's brief candle. Ah, love, forgive me if I rave. I am beside myself with joy."

"I think you are a little out of your mind," she faltered.

She let him rave. She accepted the situation. Ah, surely, surely it was this man she loved. It was this eager spirit which had passed like a breath of fire between her and Allan; this masterful nature which had possessed itself of her heart, as of a mere chattel that must needs be the prize of the strongest. She submitted to the tyranny of a love which would not accept defeat; and presently they sat down side by side in the soft lamplight, close to the piano which she loved only a little less than if it were human. They sat down side by side, his arm still round the slim waist, plighted lovers.

"Poor Allan!" she sighed, with a remorseful pang. "Has he gone down to Suffolk?"

"To Suffolk? He is on the Congo—past Stanley Falls, I hope, by this time."

"On the Congo! You have left him? Quite alone! Oh, Geoffrey, how could you?"

"Why not? He is safe enough. He knows the country as well as I. I left him near Kassongo, where he could get as big a train and as many stores as he wanted; though we have done nowadays with long trains, armies of porters, and a mountainous load of provisions."

"What will Lady Emily say? She will be dreadfully unhappy. I could not have believed you and Allan would part company—after Mr. Patrington's death."

"Why not? We were both strangers in the land. He knows how to take care of himself as well as I do."

"But two men—companions and friends—surely they would be safer than one Englishman travelling alone?" said Suzette, deeply distressed at the thought of what Allan's mother would suffer when she knew that her son's comrade had left him.

"Do you think two men are safer from fever, poisoned arrows, the bursting of a gun, the swamping of a canoe? My dearest, Allan is just as safe alone as he was when he was one of three. He had learnt a good deal about the country, and he knew how to manage the natives, and he had stores and ammunition, and the means of getting plenty more. Don't let me see that sweet face clouded. Ah, my love, my love, I shall never forget your welcoming smile—the light upon your face as you ran to the window. I had always believed in your love—always—even when you were cruellest; but to-night I know—I know that I am the chosen one."

He let his head sink on her shoulder, and nestled against her, like a child at rest near his mother's heart. How could she resist a love so fervent, so resolute—a spirit like Satan's—not to be changed

by place or time? It is the lover who will not be denied—the selfish, impetuous, unscrupulous lover who has always the better chance; and in a case like this it was a foregone conclusion that he who came back first would be the winner. The first strong appeal to the heart that had been tried by absence and anxiety, the first returning wave of romantic love. It was something more than a lover's return. It was the awakening of love from a long sleep that had seemed dull and grey and hopeless as death.

"I thought you would never come back," sighed Suzette, resigning herself to the tyranny of the conqueror, content at last to be taken by a *coup de main.* "I was afraid you and Allan would be left in that dreadful country. And I had to make believe to think you as safe as if you were in the next parish. I had to be cheerful and full of hopefulness, for your mother's sake. Your poor mother," starting up suddenly. "Oh, Geoffrey, how cruel that we should be sitting here while she is left in ignorance of your return; and she has suffered an agony of fear since she heard of poor Mr. Patrington's death. It is shameful! You must go to her this instant."

"Must I, my queen and mistress?"

"This instant. It will be a shock to her—even in the joy of your return—to see how thin and haggard you have grown. What suffering you must have gone through!"

"Only one kind of suffering—only one malady, Suzette. I was sick for love of you. Love made me do forced marches; love kept me awake of nights. Impatience was the fever that burnt in my blood—love and longing for you. Yes, yes, I am going," as she put her hand through his arm and led him to the window. "I will be at my mother's feet in half an hour, kneeling to ask for her blessing on my betrothal. There will be a double joy for her, Suzette, in my home-coming and my happiness. I left her a restless, unquiet spirit. I go back to her tamed and happy."

"Yes, yes, only go! Remember that every minute of her life of late has been a minute of anxiety. And she loves you so devotedly, Geoffrey. She has only you to love."

"I am going; but not till you have told me how soon, Suzette."

"How soon—what?"

"Our marriage."

"Geoffrey, how absurd of you to talk about that, when I hardly know that we are engaged."

"I know it. We are bound and plighted as never lovers were, to my knowledge, since Romeo and Juliet. How long did Romeo

wait, Suzette? Twenty-four hours, I think. I shall have to wait longer—for a special license."

"Geoffrey, unless you hurry away to the Manor this instant, I will never speak civilly to you again."

"Why, what a fury my love can be! What an exquisite termagant! Yes, I will wait for the license. Come to the gate with me, Suzette."

They went through the dusky garden to the old-fashioned five-barred gate which opened on to a circular drive. The night was cool and grey, and the white bloom of a catalpa tree gleamed ghost-like among the dark masses of the shrubbery. A bat wheeled across the greyness in front of the lovers, as they kissed and parted.

"Until I can get the license," he repeated, with his happy laugh. "We'll wait for nothing else."

"You will have to wait for me," she answered, tossing up her head, and running away, a swift white figure, vanishing in the bend of the drive as he stood watching her.

"Thank God!" he ejaculated. "The reward is worth all that has gone before."

CHAPTER XXXIII.

"AM I HIS KEEPER?"

BEFORE the sun had gone down upon the second day after Geoffrey's return, his engagement to Miss Vincent had become known to almost every member of Matcham society who had any right to be posted in the proceedings of the *élite*.

Mrs. Mornington, dropping in at her brother's house after breakfast, and before her daily excursion to the village, was transformed into a statue of surprise on the very threshold of the hall at hearing fiddling in her brother's drawing-room, unmistakably fiddling of a superior order; a fiddle whose grandiose chords rose loud and strong above the rippling notes of a piano—a quaint old melody of Porpora's, in strongly marked common time—a fairy-like accompaniment of delicate treble runs, light as a gauzy veil flung over the severe outlines of a bronze statue.

"She must be having accompanying lessons," thought Mrs. Mornington. "Some fiddler from Salisbury, I suppose."

She marched into the drawing-room with the privileged unceremoniousness of an aunt, and found Geoffrey Wornock standing

beside the piano, at which Suzette was sitting fresh as a rose, in a pale green frock, that looked like the calix of a living flower.

"Home!" cried Mrs. Mornington, with a step backward, and again becoming statuesque; "and I have been picturing you as eaten by tigers, or tomahawked by savages!"

"The African tiger is only a panther, and there are no tomahawks," answered Geoffrey, laying down his bow, and going across the room to shake hands with Mrs. Mornington, the Amati still under his chin.

"And Allan? Where is Allan?"

"I left him on his way to the Congo."

"You left him!—came back without him?"

"Yes. He wanted to extend his travels—to cross Africa. I was not so ambitious. I only wanted to come home."

His smile, as he turned to look at Suzette, told the astute matron all she desired to know.

"So," she exclaimed, "is the weathercock nailed to the vane at last?"

"The ship, which has been tossing so long upon a sunless sea, is safe in her haven," answered Geoffrey.

Mrs. Mornington's keen perceptions took a swift review of the position. A much better match than poor Allan! Discombe, with revenues that had accumulated at compound interest during a long minority, must be better than Beechhurst, a mere villa, and an estate in Suffolk of which Mrs. Mornington knew very little except that it was hedged in and its glory overshadowed by the lands of a Most Noble and a Right Honourable or two. Discombe! The Squire of Discombe was a personage in that little world of Matcham; and the world of Matcham was all on the earthward side of the universe for which Mrs. Mornington cared.

Suzette's shilly-shallying little ways had answered admirably, it seemed, after all. How wisely Providence orders things, if we will only fold our hands and wait.

"Don't let me interrupt your musical studies, young people," exclaimed the good lady. "I only came to know if Suzette was going to the golf-ground."

"Of course I am going, auntie, if you are walking that way and want company."

It was the kind of day on which only hat and gloves are needed for outdoor toilette; and Suzette's neat little hat was ready for her in the hall. They all three went off to the links together, along

the dusty road and through the busy little village—busy just for one morning hour—and to the common beyond, the long stretch of common that skirted the high-road, and which everybody declared to have been created on purpose for golf.

Mrs. Mornington talked about Allan nearly all the way—her regret that he had extended his travels, regret felt mostly on his mother's account.

"I think he always meant to cross from sea to sea," Geoffrey answered carelessly. "His mother ought to have been prepared for that. He read Trivier's book, and that inspired him. And really crossing Africa means very little nowadays. One's people at home needn't worry about it."

"Mr. Patrington did not find it so easy."

"Poor Patrington! No; he was unlucky. There is no reckoning with fever. That is the worst enemy."

"Did you bring home a letter for Lady Emily?"

"No. Allan wrote from Ujiji. That letter would reach England much quicker than I could."

"But you will go to see her, I dare say. No doubt it would be a comfort to her to talk to you about her son—to hear all those details which letters so seldom give."

"I will go if she ask me. Suzette has written to tell her of my return."

"She will ask you, I am sure. Or she may come to Beechhurst, as she came only a month ago, in the hope of hearing of Allan's movements from your letters to your mother."

"I was never so good a correspondent, or so good a son, as Allan."

They were at the golf-ground by this time, and here Mrs. Mornington left them; and meeting five of her particular friends on the way, told them how a strange thing had happened, and that Geoffrey Wornock, who had left England broken-hearted because Suzette had rejected him, had come back suddenly from Africa, and had been accepted.

"He took her by storm, poor child! But, after all, I believe she always preferred him to poor Allan."

There seemed nothing wanting now to Mrs. Wornock's happiness. Her son had returned, not to restlessness and impatience not to weary again of his beautiful home, but to settle down soberly with a wife he adored.

His mother was to live with him always. The Manor House was

still to be her home, the music-room her room, the organ hers. In all things she was to be as she had been—plus the son she loved, and the daughter-in-law she would have chosen for herself from all the daughters of earth.

"If it were not that I am sorry for Allan, there would not be a cloud in my sky," she told her son, on the second night after his return, when he had quieted down a little from that fever of triumphant gladness which had possessed him after his conquest of Suzette.

"Dear mother, there is no use in being sorry for Allan. We could not both be winners. To be sorry for him is to grudge me my delight; and I could easily come to believe that you are fonder of Allan than of me."

"Geoffrey!"

"Well, I'll never say so again if you'll only leave off lamenting about Allan. He will have all the world before him when he comes back to England. Somewhere, no doubt there are love and sympathy, and beauty and youth waiting for him. When he knows that Suzette has made her choice, he will accept the inevitable, and fall in love with somebody else—not at Matcham."

There was the faintest touch of irritation in his reply. That incessant reference to Allan began to jar upon his nerves. Wherever he went, he had to answer the same questions—to explain how he wanted to come home and Allan wanted to go further away; and how for that reason only they had parted. He began to feel like Cain, and to sympathize with that historical character.

But the worst was still to come. In the midst of a sonata of De Beriot's—long, brilliant, difficult—a *tour de force* for Suzette, whose fingers had not grappled with such music within the last two years, the door of the music-room was opened, and Lady Emily Carew was announced, just as upon that grey afternoon a month ago.

"Forgive me for descending upon you again in this way," she said hurriedly to Mrs. Wornock, who came from her seat by the window to receive the uninvited guest. "I couldn't rest after I received Miss Vincent's letter."

Nothing could have been colder than the "Miss Vincent," except the stately recognition of Suzette with which it was accompanied. "Mr. Wornock"—turning to Geoffrey, without even noticing his mother's outstretched hand—"why did you leave my son?"

"I thought Suzette had told you why we parted. He wished to go on. I wanted to come home. Is there anything extraordinary in that?"

"Yes. When two men go to an uncivilized country, full of dangers and difficulties, and when the third, their guide and leader, has been snatched away—surely it is very strange that they should part; very cruel of the one whose stronger will insisted upon parting."

"If you mean to imply that I had no right to come back to England without your son, I can only answer that you are very unjust. If you were a man, Lady Emily, I might be tempted to express my meaning in stronger words."

"Oh, it is easy enough for you to answer me, if you can satisfy your own conscience; if you can answer to yourself for leaving your friend and comrade helpless and alone."

"Was he more helpless than I? We parted in the centre of Africa. If I chose the easier and shorter route homeward, that route was just as open to him as to me. It was his own choice to go down the Congo River. No doubt his next letter, whenever it may reach you, will tell you all you can want to know as to his reasons for taking that route. When I offered myself as your son's companion, I accepted no apprenticeship. I was tired of Africa; he wasn't. There was no compact between us. I was under no bond to stay with him. He may choose to spend his life there, as Cecil Patrington chose, practically. I wanted to come home."

"Yes, to be first; to steal my son's sweetheart!" said Lady Emily, pale with anger, looking from Geoffrey to Suzette with flashing eyes.

"Lady Emily, you are unreasonable."

"I am a mother, and I love my son. Till I see him, till I hear from his own lips that you were not a traitor—that you did not abandon him in danger or distress, for your own selfish ends; till then I shall not cease to think of you as I think now. Your mother will, of course, believe whatever you tell her; and Miss Vincent, no doubt, was easily satisfied; but I am not to be put off so lightly—nor your conscience, as your face tells me."

She was gone before any one could answer her. She waited for no courtesy of leave-taking, for no servant to lead the way. Her own resolute hand opened and shut the door, before Mrs. Wornock could recover from the shock of her onslaught. Indeed, in those few moments, Mrs. Wornock had only eyes or apprehension for one thing, and that was Geoffrey's white face. Was it anger or remorse that made him so deadly pale?

While his mother watched him wonderingly, filled with a growing fear, his sweetheart was too deeply wounded by Lady Emily's

scornful speech to be conscious of anything but her own pain. She went back to her place at the piano, and bent her head over a page of music, pretending to study an intricate passage, but unable to read a single bar through her thickly gathering tears.

CHAPTER XXXIV

A SHADOW ACROSS THE PATH.

No more was seen or heard of Lady Emily at Matcham. Except the one fact that she had returned to Suffolk on the morning after her brief appearance at the Manor, nothing more was known about that poor lonely lady, whom adverse fate had cut adrift from all she loved. At Beechhurst closed shutters told of the master's absence; and the inquiries of the officious or the friendly elicited only the reply that Mr. Carew was still travelling in Africa, and that no letters had been received from him for a long time. He was in a country where there were no post-offices, the housekeeper opined, but she believed her ladyship heard from him occasionally.

Geoffrey's return, and the news of his engagement to Miss Vincent, made a pleasant excitement in the village and neighbourhood. An early marriage was talked about. Mr. Wornock had told the vicar that he was going to be married in a fortnight—had spoken as if he were sole master of the situation.

"As if such a nice girl as Suzette would allow herself to be hustled into marriage without time for a trousseau," persisted Bessie Edgefield, who assured her friends that there would be no wedding that year. "It may be in January," she said; "but it won't be before the New Year."

Geoffrey had pleaded in vain. He had won his sweetheart's promise; but his sweetheart was not to be treated in too masterful a fashion.

"God knows why we are waiting, or what we are waiting for," he said, in one of those fits of nervous irritability, which even Suzette's influence could not prevent. "Hasn't my probation been long enough? Haven't I suffered enough? Haven't you kept me on the rack of uncertainty long enough to satisfy your love of power? You are like all women; you think of a lover as a surgeon thinks of a rabbit, too low in the scale for his feelings to be considered—just good enough for vivisection."

"Can't we be happy, Geoffrey? We have everything in the world that we care for."

"I can never be happy till I am sure of you. I am always dreading the moment in which you will tell me you have changed your mind."

"I have given you my promise. Isn't that enough?"

"No, it is not enough. You gave Allan your promise, and broke it."

She started up from her seat by the piano, and turned upon him indignantly.

"If you are capable of saying such things as that, we had better bid each other good-bye at once," she said. "I won't submit to be reminded of my wrong-doing by you, who are the sole cause of it. If I had never seen you, I should be Allan's wife this day. You came between us; you tempted me away from him; and now you tell me I am fickle and untrustworthy. I begin to think I have made a worse mistake in promising to be your wife than I made when I engaged myself to Allan."

"That means that you are regretting him—that you wish he were here now—in my place."

"Not in your place; but I wish he were safe in England. It makes me miserable to be so uncertain of his fate, for his mother's sake."

"Well, he will be in England soon enough, I dare say. But you will be my wife by that time; and I shall be secure of my prize. I shall be able to defy a hundred Allans."

And then he sat down by her side, and pleaded for her pardon, almost with tears. He hated himself for those jealous doubts which devoured him, he told her—those fears of he knew not what. If she were but his wife, his own for ever, that stormy soul of his would enter into a haven of peace. The colour of his life would be changed.

"And even for Allan's sake," he argued, "it is better that there should be no delay. He will accept the situation more easily if he find us man and wife. A man always submits to the inevitable. It is uncertainty which kills."

He pleaded, and was forgiven; and by-and-by Suzette was induced to consent to an earlier date for her marriage. It was to be in the second week of December—five months after Geoffrey's return, and the honeymoon was to be spent upon that lovely shore where there is no winter; and then, early in the year, Suzette and her husband were to establish themselves at Discombe; and the doors of the Manor House were to be opened as they had never been

opened since old Squire Wornock was a young man. Matcham was in good spirits at the prospect of pleasant hospitalities, a going and coming of nice people from London. Nobody in the immediate neighbourhood could afford to entertain upon a scale which would be a matter of course for Geoffrey Wornock.

"December will be here before we know where we are," said Mrs. Mornington, and her constitutional delight in action and bustle of all kinds again found a safety-valve in the preparation of Suzette's trousseau.

Again she was confronted by a chilling indifference in the young lady for whom the clothes were being made. She advised Suzette to spend a week in London, in order to get her frocks and jackets from the best people. Salisbury would have been good enough for Allan, and Beechhurst; but for Squire Wornock's wife—for the Riviera—and for Discombe Manor, the most fashionable London artists should be called upon for their best achievements.

"I suppose you'll want to look well when you show yourself at Cannes as Mrs. Wornock? You won't want to be another awful example of an Englishwoman wearing out her old clothes on the Continent," said Mrs. Mornington, snappishly.

As the General was also in favour of a week in town, Suzette consented, and bored herself to death in the family circle of an aunt who was almost a stranger, but who had been offering her hospitality ever since she could remember. At this lady's house in Bryanstone Square, she spent a weary week of shopping, and trying on, always under the commanding eye of Aunt Mornington, who delighted in tramping about London out of the season, a London in which one could do just what one liked, without fear or favour of society.

And so the trousseau was put in hand; the wedding-gown chosen; the wedding-cake ordered; Mrs. Mornington taking all trouble off her brother's hands in the matter of the reception that was to be held after the wedding. Everybody was to be asked, of course; but the invitations were not to go out till a fortnight before the day.

"I don't want people to suppose I am giving them plenty of time to think about wedding-presents," Suzette explained, when she insisted upon this short notice.

All these arrangements were made in October—the marriage settlement was drafted, and everybody was satisfied, since Geoffrey's liberality had required the curb rather than the spur.

For the rest of the year the lovers had nothing to think of but

each other, and those great spirits of the past whose voices still spoke to them, whose genius was the companion of their lives. Beethoven, Mozart, Mendelssohn, Chopin, Schubert, were the friends of those quiet days; and love found its most eloquent interpreters in the language of the dead.

Sometimes, with a dim foreboding of evil, Suzette found herself wondering what she would do with that fiery restless spirit, were it not for that soothing influence of music; but she could not imagine Geoffrey dissociated from that second voice which seemed more characteristic of him than any spoken language—that voice of passionate joys and passionate regrets, of deepest melancholy, and of wildest mirth. Music made a third in their lives—the strongest link between them, holding them aloof from that outside world to which the mysteries of harmony were unknown. Matcham society shrugged shoulders of wonder, not unmixed with disdain, when it was told how Miss Vincent practised six hours a day at home or at Discombe, and how she was beginning to play as well as a professional. There had been a little dinner at the Manor House, and Geoffrey and his betrothed had played a duet which they called a Salterello, and Mrs. Mornington was complimented on her niece's gifts. Her execution was really surprising! No other young lady in Matcham could play like that. The girls of the present day lived too much out-of-doors to aspire to "execution." If they could play some little thing of Schumann's or the easiest of Chopin's or Rubinstein's valses, they were satisfied with themselves.

The hunting season began, but Geoffrey only hunted occasionally. He went only when General Vincent and his daughter went, not otherwise. Suzette had three or four hunters at her disposal now, and could have ridden to hounds three times a week had she so desired. Geoffrey's first care had been to get some of his best horses ready for carrying a lady; and she had her own thoroughbred, clever and kind, and able to carry her for a long day's work. But Suzette was not rabid about riding to honnds in all weathers, and at all distances. She liked a day now and then when her father was inclined to take her; but she had no idea of giving up her whole life—books, music, cottage visiting, home, for fox-hunting. Geoffrey gave up many a day's sport in order to spend the wintry hours in the music-room at Discombe, or in long rambles in the woods, or over the downs with his betrothed.

Was he happy, having won his heart's desire? Suzette sometimes found herself asking that question, of herself, not of him. He

was a creature of moods: sometimes animated, eloquent, hopeful, talking of life as if doubt, sorrow, satiety were unknown to him, undreamt of by him; at other times strangely depressed, silent and gloomy, a dismal companion for a joyous high-spirited girl. Those moods of his scared Suzette; but she was prepared to put up with them. She had chosen him, or allowed herself to be chosen by him. She had bound herself to life-companionship with that fitful eager spirit. For him she had forsaken a lover whose happier nature need never have caused her an hour's anxiety—a man whose thoughts and feelings were easy to read and understand. She had taken the lover whose caprices and moods had awakened a romantic interest, had aroused first curiosity, then sympathy and regard. It was because he was a genius she loved him; and she must resign herself to the capricious varieties of temperament which make genius difficult to deal with in everyday life.

No news of Allan reached Matcham till the beginning of November, when Mrs. Mornington took upon herself to write to Lady Emily about him, and received a very cold reply.

"I heard from my son last week," Lady Emily wrotc, after a stately acknowledgment of Mrs. Mornington's inquiry. "He has been laid up with fever, but is better, and on his way home. He wrote from Brazzaville. It is something to know that he did not die in the desert, neglected and alone. Even on the eve of her marriage, your niece may be glad to hear that my son has survived her unkindness, and Mr. Wornock's desertion; and that I am hoping to welcome him home before long."

Mrs. Mornington showed the letter to Suzette, whose mind was greatly relieved by this news of Allan.

"It is such a comfort to know that he is safe," she told Geoffrey, after commenting upon the unkindness of Lady Emily's letter.

The news which was so cheering to her had a contrary effect upon her lover. There was a look of trouble in Geoffrey's face when he was told of Allan's expected arrival, and he took no pains to conceal his displeasure.

"I am sorry you have suffered such intense anxiety," he said resentfully. "Did you suspect me of having murdered him?"

"Nonsense, Geoffrey! I could not help thinking of all possible dangers; and it distressed me to know that other people thought you unkind in leaving him."

"Other people have talked like fools—as foolishly as his mother, in whom one forgives folly. I was not his nurse, or his doctor, or

his hired servant. I was only a casual companion; and I was free to leave him how and when I pleased."

"But not to leave him in distress or difficulty. *I* knew you could not have done that. I knew that you could not act ungenerously. I think Lady Emily ought to make you a very humble apology for her rudeness, when she has her son safe at home."

"She may keep her apologies for people who value her opinion. I shall be a thousand miles away when her son returns."

He was silent and gloomy for the rest of the morning, and Suzette felt that she had offended him. Was he so jealous of her former lover that even the mention of his name—a natural interest in his safety—could awaken angry feelings, and make a distance between them? Even their music went badly, and Mrs. Wornock, from her seat by the fire, reproached them for careless playing.

"That sonata of Porpora's went ever so much better last week," she said, on which Geoffrey threw down his bow in disgust.

"I dare say you are right. I am not in the cue for music. Will you come for a ride directly after lunch, Suzette? I can drive you home, and the horses can follow while you are getting on your habit. We might fall in with the hounds."

Suzette declined this handsome offer. She was not going to stay to lunch.

"Father complains that I am never at home," she said, putting away the music.

"Your father is out with the hounds. What is the use of your going back to an empty house?"

"I would rather be at home to-day, Geoffrey."

"To think about Allan, and offer a thanksgiving for his safety?"

"I am full of thankfulness, and I am not ashamed of being glad."

She went over to Mrs. Wornock, who had been too much absorbed in her book to be aware that the lovers were quarrelling, till Suzette's brief good-bye and rapid departure startled her out of her tranquillity.

"Aren't you going to walk home with her, Geoffrey?" she asked when her son returned to the music-room, after escorting his sweetheart no further than the hall-door.

"No," he answered curtly; "we have had enough of each other for to-day."

He went to the library, where the morning papers were lying unread, and turned to the second page of the *Times* for the list of steamers, and then to the shipping intelligence.

Zanzibar? Yes, there was a steamer reported from Zanzibar. She had passed the Needles yesterday afternoon. Allan was in England, perhaps. If all went well with him, he would come by the first ship after the mail that brought his letter. He was in England —he whom Geoffrey had cruelly, treacherously deserted, helpless, and alone.

"All is fair in love," Geoffrey told himself; "but I wonder what Suzette will think of her future husband when she knows all? Her future husband! If I were but her actual husband, I could defy Fate. Who knows? something may have happened to hinder his return—a fit of fever, a difficulty on the road. Three more weeks, and he may come back safe and sound; it won't matter to me; I have no murderous thoughts about him. He may tell her the worst he can about me. Once my wife, I can hold and keep her in spite of the world. I will teach her that the man who sins for love's sake must be forgiven for the sake of his love."

He was consumed with a fever of anxiety which would not let him rest within four walls. He walked to Beechhurst, and unearthed a caretaker, who came strolling from the distant stables, where he had been enlivening his idleness by gossip with the grooms. The blinds and shutters were all closed. Nothing had been heard from Mr. Carew.

"If he were in England you would have heard from him, I suppose?" said Geoffrey.

"Yes, sir; he would have wired, no doubt. My wife is housekeeper, and she would have had notice to get the house ready."

"Even if Mr. Carew had gone to Suffolk, in the first instance?"

"I should think so, sir. He would know we should want time to prepare for him."

There was relief in this—no news. Perhaps the ship that passed the Needles yesterday had carried no such passenger as the man whose return Geoffrey Wornock dreaded.

He went back to the Manor in the gloom of a November twilight. The deepening dusk and the loneliness of the road suited his humour. He wanted to be alone, to think out the situation, to walk down the devil within him.

Matcham Church clock was chiming the third quarter after four when he opened the gate and went into Discombe Wood; but when the Discombe dressing-bell rang—an old-fashioned bell in a cupola, which gave needless information to every cottager within half a mile of the Manor House—Geoffrey had not come in.

His valet waited about for him till nearly dinner-time, and then went down to the drawing-room to ask Mrs. Wornock if his master was to dine at home.

"He is not in his dressing-room, ma'am. Will you wait dinner for him?"

"Yes, yes, of course I shall wait. Tell them to keep the dinner back."

The dinner was kept back so long that nobody eat any of it, out of the servants' hall. Mrs. Wornock spent a troubled evening in the music-room, full of harassing fears; while grooms rode here and there—to Marsh House, to inquire if Mr. Wornock was dining there; to Matcham Road Station, to ask if he had left by any train, up or down the line; to the Vicarage, a most unlikely place, and to other houses where it was just possible, but most improbable, that he should allow himself to be detained; but nowhere within the narrow circle of Matcham life was Mr. Wornock to be heard of.

"Pray don't be anxious about Geoffrey," Suzette wrote, in answer to Mrs. Wornock's hastily scribbled note of inquiry; "you know how erratic he is. He was vexed at something I said about Allan this morning, and he has gone off somewhere in a huff. Keep up your spirits, chère mère. I will be with you early to-morrow morning. *I* am not frightened."

"She is not frightened! If she loved him as I do, she would be as anxious as I am," commented Mrs. Wornock, when she had read Suzette's letter.

CHAPTER XXXV

"IT IS THE STARS."

Morning brought no relief of mind to Mrs. Wornock, since it brought no news of her son; but before night there was even greater anxiety at Beechhurst, where Allan Carew's mother arrived late in the evening, summoned by a letter from her son, despatched from Southampton on the previous day, announcing his arrival, and asking her to join him at Beechhurst.

"I would go straight to Suffolk," he wrote, "knowing how anxious my dear, tender-hearted mother will be to welcome her wanderer home, only—only I think you know that there is some one at Matcham about whose feelings I have still a shadow of

doubt, still a lingering hope. I go there first, where perhaps I may meet you; and if I find that faint hope to be only a delusion, I know you will sympathize with my final disappointment.

"I have passed through many adventures and some dangers since I left the great lake. I have been ill, and I have been lonely; but I come back to England the same man who went away—unchanged in heart and mind. However altered you may find the outer man, the inner man is the same."

Having telegraphed from Waterloo to announce her arrival at Matcham Road Station, Lady Emily was bitterly disappointed at not finding her son waiting for her on the platform. She looked eagerly out into the November darkness, searching for the well-known figure among the few people standing here and there along the narrow platform. There was no Allan, and there was no Beechhurst carriage waiting for her.

The station-master recognized her as she alighted, and came to assist in the selection of her luggage, while a porter ran off to order a fly from the inn outside.

"Mr. Carew was expected home yesterday. Did he come?" asked Lady Emily, with that faint sickness of blank despair which follows on such a disappointment.

She had pictured the moment of reunion over and over again during the journey—had fancied how he would look, what he would say to her, and the delight of their long confidential talk on the drive home, and the pleasure of their *tête-à-tête* dinner. The only shadow upon her happy thought of him was her knowledge of what his faithful heart must needs suffer when he found that Suzette had engaged herself to his rival.

The station-master informed Lady Emily that Mr. Carew had arrived the day before, by this very train. He had evidently sent no notice of his arrival, as there was no carriage to meet him. He had very little luggage with him—only a portmanteau and a bale of rugs and sticks, which had been sent to Beechhurst by the station 'bus. Mr. Carew had walked home.

He was at home, then. The gladness of reunion was only delayed for an hour. His mother tried to make light of her disappointment and of his neglect. He had given an order to the stable, perhaps, and it had been forgotten. There was a mistake somewhere, but no unkindness on his part.

"Was my son looking in pretty good health?" she asked the station-master.

"Yes, my lady, allowing for the wear and tear of a sea-voyage, Mr. Carew looked pretty well; but he looked pulled down a bit since he went away. You mustn't be surprised at a little change in that way."

"Yes, yes, no doubt he is altered. Years of travel and fatigue and danger. Ah, there is the fly; they have been very quick. Come, Taylor," to the middle-aged, homely Suffolk abigail who stood on guard over her mistress's luggage.

The drive through the November night seemed longer to the lady inside the carriage, sitting alone and longing for the sight of her son's face, than to her maid on the box beside John coachman, of the Station Inn, chatting sociably about the improvements in the neighbourhood and the prospects of the hunting season. And, oh, bitter agony of disappointment when the door of Beechhurst was open, and Lady Emily saw only a half-lit hall and staircase, and the stolid countenance of butler and caretaker, whose informal attire too plainly showed her that his master was not in the house.

"Has Mr. Carew gone away again?" she asked, as the man helped her out of the carriage, thinking vaguely that Allan might have started off for Suffolk that morning, and that she and he were travelling to and fro at cross purposes.

"Mr. Carew has not been home, my lady."

"Not been home? Why, he arrived yesterday by the train I came by to-night. The station-master told me so."

"Then he must be visiting somewhere in the neighbourhood, my lady. Some luggage was brought at nine o'oclock; but my master has not been home."

She stood looking at the man dumbly, paralyzed by apprehension. Where could Allan be? what could he have done with himself? His letter had asked her to meet him in that house. He had arrived at the station twenty-four hours before he could expect her; he had sent home his luggage, and had walked out of the station in the most casual manner, saying that he was going home. Was it credible that he would go to anybody else's house, straight from the station, luggageless, newly landed after a long sea-voyage? No man in his senses would so act. Yet there was but one course for an anxious mother to take, and Lady Emily returned to the fly, and ordered the man to drive to Marsh House.

Allan might have gone straight to Suzette. Who could tell what effect the news of her approaching marriage might have upon his mind? His letter told his mother that he still hoped; and the

change from hope to despair would be crushing. He might have hurried away from the scene of his disappointment, careless how or where he went, so long as he got himself far away from the place associated with his fickle sweetheart.

Suzette was at home, and received Lady Emily kindly, forgetting all that had gone before in her compassion for the mother's distress.

Allan had called at Marsh House on the previous evening during Suzette's absence. He had been told that she was at the Manor, and the servant had understood him to say that he was going on to the Manor. He had seemed put out at hearing where she was, the soldier servant had told his young mistress.

"And were you not at the Manor when he called?" Lady Emily asked.

"No; I left before lunch; but instead of coming home, where I was not expected, I spent the afternoon at the Vicarage and on the golf-ground with Bessie Edgefield."

"And Mr. Wornock was with you most of the time, I suppose?"

"Not any of the time."

"Is he away, then?"

"No. If you must know the truth, we had—well, I can hardly say, we had quarrelled; but Geoffrey had been very disagreeable, and I was glad to leave him to himself for the afternoon."

"You are good friends again now, no doubt?"

"We have not seen each other since. Geoffrey has gone away, without letting any one know where he was going, and his poor mother is anxious and unhappy about him. He is so impetuous—so erratic."

"And you, his sweetheart, are still more anxious, no doubt?"

"I am anxious chiefly for his poor mother's sake. She is too easily frightened."

"Can they have gone away together, anywhere?" said Lady Emily.

"Together—Allan and Geoffrey!" exclaimed Suzette. "No, I don't think they would do that."

"Why not? They were together for two years in Africa."

"Yes, but that was different. I don't think, in Geoffrey's temper, that he would have gone on a journey with your son. He has a jealous temper, I am sorry to say, and he was irritable and unreasonable yesterday when he heard of—Mr. Carew's return. Is it likely that he would have gone off on any expedition with him—to London or anywhere else?"

"Then where is my son? He was here at this hour yesterday. He left here to go to the Manor; and now you tell me that Mr. Wornock is missing, and that my son has not been heard of since he left your door."

"He has not been at the Manor. Mrs. Wornock would have told me if he had called. I was with her all this morning. She is wretched about Geoffrey. They are both safe, I dare say; but their disappearance is very alarming."

"Alarming, yes. It means something dreadful—something I dare not think of—unless, indeed, Allan changed his mind on finding the state of things here, and went off to Suffolk, intending to anticipate my journey. Oh, I dare say I am frightening myself for nothing. Will you let me write a telegram?" looking distractedly round the room for pens and ink.

"Dear Lady Emily, pray don't be too anxious. One is so often frightened for nothing. My father has only to be an hour later than usual on a hunting day in order to make me half distracted. Please sit down by the fire, here in this comfortable chair. I'll write your telegram, and send it off instantly."

She rang the bell, and then seated herself quietly at her writing-table, while Allan's mother sank into a chair, the image of helplessness.

"What shall I say?"

"To Allan Carew, Fendyke, Millfield, Suffolk.

"I am miserable at not finding you here. Reply immediately, with full information as to your plans.

"Emily Carew."

"God grant I may hear of him there," said Lady Emily, when she had read message and address with a searching eye, lest Suzette's writing should offer any excuse for mistakes. The telegram was handed to the servant with instructions to take it himself to the post-office; and then Lady Emily kissed Suzette with a sad, remorseful kiss, and went back to the fly.

"Discombe Manor," she told the man, with very little consideration for the hard-working fly-horse.

"Yes, my lady; it'll be about as much as he can do."

"He? What do you mean?"

"The horse, my lady. He's been on his legs two hours a'ready, and the Manor's a good three mile; but I suppose I shall be able to wash out his mouth there before I takes him home?"

"Yes, yes; you may do what you like; only get me to the Manor as fast as you can."

Allan had not been seen at the Manor. No one had rung the hall-door bell yesterday after luncheon. Mrs. Wornock's monastic solitude was not often intruded upon by visitors; and yesterday there had been no one. The door had not been opened after Miss Vincent went out, Geoffrey Wornock's impatient temper always choosing an easier mode of egress than that ponderous hall door, which required a servant's attendance, or else closed with a bang that reverberated through the house. Whatever Allan's intention might have been when he left Marsh House, he had not come to Diseombe.

Lady Emily and Mrs. Wornock were softened in their feelings for each other by a mutual terror; but Allan's mother dwelt upon the fact that the two young men, as fellow-travellers of old, might have started off upon some expedition; a run up to London to see some new production at the theatre; a billiard match; anything in which young men might be interested.

"They must be much better friends than before they went to Africa—much closer companions," urged Lady Emily. "I feel there is less reason for fear now that I know your son is missing as well as Allan."

Mrs. Wornock tried to take the same hopeful view; but she was of a less hopeful temperament, and she knew too much of Geoffrey's jealous distrust of his rival to believe that there had been any companionable feeling between the two young men since Allan's return.

"Oh, I am afraid, I am afraid!" she moaned piteously, wringing her hands in an agony of apprehension.

"What is it you fear? What calamity can have happened which would involve both your son and mine? Surely nothing dreadful could happen to both our sons, and yet no tidings come either to you or to me. Wherever they were—if any accident happened—one or other of them would be recognized. Some one would bring us the news. No; I have been anxious and unhappy; but I am sure now that I have been needlessly anxious. We shall hear from them—very soon."

Mrs. Wornock clasped Lady Emily's hand in silence, and shook her head despondently.

"What is it you fear?" asked Allan's mother.

"I don't know—but I am full of fear for Geoffrey—for both of them."

Lady Emily left her, depressed and dispirited by the fear which shrunk from shaping itself in words. The disposition to take a hopeful view of the case did not last in the face of Mrs. Wornock's mysterious agitations, and Allan's mother went back to Beechhurst stupefied with anxiety, able only to walk about the house, in and out of the empty rooms, in helpless misery.

That state of not knowing what to fear ended suddenly soon after nine o'clock, when there came the sound of wheels, and a carriage stopped at the hall door. Lady Emily rushed to the door and opened it with her own hands, before any one had time to ring the bell; opened it to find herself face to face with the woman she had left only two hours before.

Mrs. Wornock was stepping out of her carriage as the hall door opened. She wore neither bonnet nor cloak, only a shawl wrapped round her head and shoulders.

"He is found!" she said, agitatedly. "Will you come with me?"

"Your son?"

"No; Allan Carew. Ah, it is dreadful to think of, dreadful to tell you. I came myself; I wouldn't let any one else——"

"He is dead!" cried Lady Emily, her heart feeling like ice, her knees trembling under her.

"No, no! Dreadfully hurt—but not dead. There is hope still—Mr. Podmore does not give up hope. I have sent a messenger to Salisbury. We shall have Dr. Etheridge to-morrow morning—or I will send to London——"

"Where is my son—my murdered—dying son?"

"No, no, no—not dying—not murdered. Don't I tell you there is hope? He is at Discombe—they have put him in Geoffrey's room. Everything is being done. He may recover—he will, he must recover."

Lady Emily was seated in the brougham, unconscious of the movements that had conveyed her there; the butler was at the hall door by this time, staring in blank wonder, not knowing what to think of this rapid departure.

"Send your mistress's maid to the Manor, with her things," ordered Mrs. Wornock, hurriedly. And then to her own servant, waiting at the carriage door, "Home—as fast as you can drive."

"Why was he taken to your house, and not to his own?" asked Lady Emily, in a dull whisper, when the carriage had driven out of the gates.

Because it was so much nearer to bring him. He was found in our woods—robbed—and hurt, cruelly hurt. There is a dreadful wound upon his head, and there are signs of a desperate struggle—as if he had fought for his life——"

"Oh, God, that he should be murdered—here in England—within an hour's walk of his own house! And I have dreamt of him in some dreadful danger—from savage beasts, savage men—night after night, in those dreary years he was away—and that he should come home—home—to love, and happiness, and safety, as I thought—to meet the fate I had been fearing! I prayed God day and night for him—prayed that he might be brought back to me in safety. And he came back—came back only to die," wailed the unhappy woman, her head sunk upon her knees, her hands working convulsively amongst her loosened hair.

"He will *not* die," cried Mrs. Wornock, fiercely. "Don't I tell you that he will not die? The wound need not be fatal; the doctor said it was not a hopeless case. Why do you go on raving—as if you wanted him to die—as if you were bent on being miserable—and driving me mad?"

"You! What have you to do with it? He is not your son. Your son is safe enough, I dare say. Your son—who left him in the desert—who came sneaking home to steal his comrade's sweetheart. Your son is safe. Selfish wretches of that kind are never in danger."

Mrs. Wornock bore this insulting speech in silence; and there was no word more on either side for the rest of the journey.

Not without hope! Looking down at the motionless form lying on Geoffrey Wornock's bed, in the large airy room, the hand on the coverlet as white as the lawn sheet, the face disfigured and hardly to be recognized as Allan's face under the broad linen bandage which covered forehead and eyes, the lips livid and speechless—looking with agonized heart at this spectacle, Allan's mother found it hard to believe the doctor's assurance that the case was not, in his humble opinion, utterly hopeless.

"We shall know more to-morrow," he said.

"Are they trying to find the wretch who did it?" asked Lady Emily. "God grant he may be hanged for murder, if my son is to die."

"I shall go from here to the police-station, and take all necessary steps, if I have your ladyship's authority for doing so. The keeper who found your poor son sent a lad off to give information."

"Yes, yes. And you will offer a reward—a large reward. My poor boy—my dear, dear son—to see him lying there—quite unconscious—speechless—helpless. My murdered boy! Where did they find him—how——"

"Lying in a little hollow among the underwood, within a few paces of the path. There is a gate in the fence opening into the high-road, and a footpath, and cart-track, which cut into the main drive four or five hundred yards from the gate. It is a point at which he might be likely to meet a tramp—as it is so near the road—and a long way from any of the lodge gates. The drive would be in Mr. Carew's straight course from Marsh House here."

"Yes, yes! And it was a tramp—you are sure of that—a common robber—who attacked him?"

"Evidently. His pockets were turned inside out—his watch was gone."

"There was a day when no one man would have dared to attack my son."

"There may have been two men. The ground was a good deal trampled, the keeper told me; but they would be able to see very little by the light of a couple of lanterns brought from the stables to the north lodge. We shall see the footsteps, and be able to come to a better idea of the struggle, to-morrow morning."

"Send for a London detective—the best that can be got," Lady Emily interrupted eagerly.

"Be sure we will do all that can be done."

"He has no father to take his part," she went on, distractedly; "no wife—no sweetheart even—to care for him—only a poor, weak mother. If he should die, there will be only one broken heart in the world—only one——"

"Dear lady, why anticipate the worst?" remonstrated the doctor.

"Yes, yes, I am wrong. I must cast myself upon God's mercy. I am not an irreligious woman. I will pray for him—pray. There is nothing else in the world that I can do. But while I am praying you will work—you will find the wretch who did this cruel deed. You will send for the cleverest doctor in London—the one man of all men who can cure my poor boy."

"You may trust me, Lady Emily. Nothing shall be forgotten or deferred."

It was not till the following morning that the news of Allan Carew's condition, and his presence at Discombe, reached General

Vincent and his daughter. Mrs. Mornington was the bearer of those dismal tidings. Always active, alert, and early afoot, she heard of the tragedy from the village tradesmen, and was told three conflicting versions of the story—first at the grocer's, where she was assured that Mr. Carew had breathed his last five minutes after he was carried into the Manor House; next from the butcher's wife, a very ladylike person, rarely seen except through glass, in a little counting-house, giving on to the shop—and who opened her glass shutter on purpose to inform Mrs. Mornington that both young gentlemen had been picked up for dead in the copse at Discombe; Mr. Wornock shot through the heart, Mr. Carew with a bullet in his left temple, the result of a duel to the death. A third informant, taking the air in front of the coachbuilder's workshop—where everybody's carriages went sooner or later for repairs—assured Mrs. Mornington that there hadn't been much harm done, and that Mr. Carew, who had had his pockets picked by a tramp, had been more frightened than hurt.

Mrs. Mornington was not the kind of person to languish in uncertainty about any fact in local history while she possessed the nerves of speech and locomotion. Before the coachbuilder finished his rambling story, she had despatched a village boy to the Grove to order her pony-cart to be brought her as quickly as the groom could get it ready; and her orders being always respected, the honest bay cob met her, rattling his bit and whisking his tail from joyous freshness, at the bend of the village street, within a quarter of an hour of the messenger's start. The boy had run his fastest; the groom had not lost a moment; for Mrs. Mornington was one of those excellent mistresses who stand no nonsense from their servants.

The cob went to Discombe at a fast trot, and returned stablewards still faster, indulging in occasional spurts of cantering, which his mistress did not check with her usual severity.

She saw no one but servants at the Manor House. Mrs. Wornock was in her own room, quite prostrate, the butler explained; Lady Emily was with Mr. Carew, who had passed a bad night, and was certainly no better this morning, even if he were no worse.

"Is it very serious, David?" Mrs. Mornington asked the trustworthy old servant.

"I'm afraid it couldn't be much worse, ma'am. The doctor from Salisbury was here at nine o'clock, and was upstairs with Mr. Podmore very near an hour; but he didn't look very cheerful when he left—no more did Mr. Podmore. And there's another doctor

been telegraphed for from London. If doctors can save the poor gentleman's life, he'll be spared. But I saw his face last night when he was carried upstairs, and I can't say *I've* much hopes of him."

"Never mind your hopes, David, if the doctors can pull him through. A young man can get over a good deal."

"If he can get over having his head mashed—and lying for twenty-seven hours in a wood—he must have a better constitootion than ever I heard tell of."

"The wretch who attacked him has not been found yet, I suppose?"

"No, ma'am, not yet, nor never likely to be, so far as I can see. He had seven and twenty hours' start, you see, ma'am; and if a professional thief couldn't get off with that much law, the profession can't be up to much; begging your pardon, ma'am, for venturing to express an opinion," concluded David, who felt that he had been presuming on an old servant's license.

Mrs. Mornington told him she was very glad to hear his opinion, and then handed him cards for the two ladies, on each of which she had scribbled assurances of sympathy; and with this much information from the fountain-head, she appeared in the drawing-room at Marsh House, where she found Suzette sitting by the fire in a very despondent mood. Her lover's mysterious disappearance after something which was very like a quarrel, was not a cheering incident in her life, and now Lady Emily's anxiety about her son—the fact that he, too, should be missing—increased her trouble of mind.

She listened aghast to her aunt's story.

"What does it mean?" she faltered. "What can it mean?"

"The meaning is plain enough, I think. This poor young man was waylaid in the dusk on Thursday evening—attacked and plundered."

"By a tramp?"

"By one of the criminal classes—a ticket-of-leave man, perhaps, rambling from Portland to London, ready to snatch any opportunity on the way. There's very little use in speculating about a wretch of that class. There are plenty of such ruffians loose in the world, I dare say."

"But it would have served a robber's purpose just as well to have only stunned him."

"Oh, those gentry don't consider things so nicely. No doubt Allan showed fight. And the ruffian would have no mercy."

"Do you think he will die? Oh, aunt, how terrible if he were to die. And Geoffrey still away—Mrs. Wornock miserable about him!"

"Yes, that's the strangest part of the business! What can have induced Geoffrey to take himself off in that mysterious way? Have you any idea why he went?"

"No. I have no idea."

"If he is keeping away of his own accord—if nothing dreadful has happened to him—his conduct is most insulting to you."

"Never mind me, aunt; while there is this trouble at Discombe—for poor Lady Emily."

"I am very sorry for her; but I am obliged to think of you. His behaviour places you in such an awkward position—a ridiculous position. Your wedding-day fixed—hurried on with red-hot impatience by this young man—and he, the bridegroom, missing! What do you suppose people will say?"

"I have no suppositions about people outside our lives. I can only think of the sorrow at Discombe. People can say anything they like," Suzette answered wearily.

Her father had been questioning her, and had talked very much in the same strain as her aunt. She was tired to heart-sickness of talk about Geoffrey. All had grown dark in her life; and darkest of all was her thought of her betrothed.

There had been that in his manner when she parted with him which had filled her with a shapeless dread, a terror not to be lightly named, a terror she had not ventured to suggest even to her father. And here was her aunt teasing her about other people—utterly indifferent people—and their ideas.

"What will people *not* say?" exclaimed Mrs. Mornington, after a troubled pause, in which she had poked the fire almost savagely, and pulled a chairback straight. "I must have a serious talk with your father. Is he at home?"

"No. He is out shooting."

"Shooting? It is scarcely decent of him in the present state of affairs. Any more presents?"

"I don't know. Yes; there was a box came this morning. I haven't opened it. Please don't talk of presents. It is too horrid to think of them."

"Horridly embarrassing," said Mrs. Mornington. "You had better come to the Grove, Suzette. There's no good in your moping alone here. And you may have visitors in the afternoon prying and questioning."

"Thanks, aunt, I would rather be at home. I shall deny myself to everybody except Bessie Edgefield."

"Ah, and you'll tell her everything, and she will tell everybody in Matcham."

"I have nothing to tell—nothing that Bessie cannot find out from other people. But she is not a gossip; and she is always *simpatica*."

CHAPTER XXXVI.

MADNESS OR CRIME?

Days grew into weeks, and the slow, anxious hours brought very little change in Allan's condition, and certainly no change which the doctors could call a substantial improvement. Physician and surgeon from London, famous specialists both, came at weekly intervals and testified to the good fight which the patient was making, and the latent power of a frame which had been strained and wasted by the hardships of African travel, and which was now called upon to recover from severe injuries. Consciousness had returned, but not reason. The young man had not once recognized the mother who rarely left his bedside, but whose bland and pleasant countenance was so sorely altered by grief and anxiety that even in the full possession of his senses he might hardly have known her. The power of speech had returned, but only in delirious utterances, or in a strange gibberish, which poor Lady Emily mistook for an African language, but which was really the nonsense-tongue of a disordered brain.

The doctors pronounced the case not utterly without hope; but they would commit themselves to nothing further than this. It was a wonder to have kept him alive so long. His recovery would be almost a miracle.

Two trained nurses from the county hospital alternated the daily and nightly watch by the sick-bed, and Lady Emily shared the day's, and sometimes the night's, duty, humbly assisting the skilled attendants, grateful for being permitted to aid in the smallest service for the son who lay helpless, inert, and unobserving on that bed which even yet might be his bed of death.

No one but those three women and the doctors was allowed to enter Allan's room. Mrs. Wornock was very kind and sympathetic, in spite of torturing anxieties about her son's unexplained absence; but she expressed no desire to see Allan, and she seldom saw Lady Emily for more than a few minutes in the course of the day. The whole house was ordered with reference to the sick-room. Organ

and piano were closed and dumb, and a funereal silence reigned everywhere.

And so the wintry days went by, and rain and rough weather made a sufficient excuse for Suzette's staying quietly at home, and seeing very little of the outer world. Mrs. Mornington took the social aspect of the crisis entirely on her own hands, and informed her friends that the wedding had been deferred, partly on account of Allan's illness, and for other reasons which she was not at liberty to explain.

"My niece is very capricious," she said.

"I hope she has not sent Mr. Wornock off to Africa again!" exclaimed Mrs. Roebuck. "Such a brilliant young man, with a house so peculiarly adapted for entertaining, should not be allowed to become an absentee. It is too great a loss for such a place as this, where so few people entertain."

Mrs. Roebuck's estimate of her acquaintance was always based upon their capacity for entertaining, though she herself, on this scale, would have been marked zero.

"No, I don't think he will go back to Africa. But my niece and he have agreed to part—for a short time, at any rate. She is sending back all her wedding-presents this week."

"Oh, pray don't let her send me that absurd Japanese paper-knife! I only chose it because it is so deliciously ugly and queer. And I knew that, marrying a man of Mr. Wornock's means, she wouldn't want anything costly or useful—no fish-knives or salt-cellars."

"Well, if it really is off, or likely to be off," Mr. Roebuck said, with a solemnly confidential air, "I don't mind saying in confidence that I think your niece has acted wisely. The young man is a genius, no doubt; but he's a little bit overstrung—*fanatico per la musica*, don't you know. And one never knows whether that sort of thing won't go further," tapping his forehead suggestively.

"Oh, *das macht nichts;* the poor dear young man is *toqué*, only *toqué*, not *fêlé*," protested Mrs. Roebuck, who affected a polyglot style.

"Ah, but the mother, don't you know! That's where the danger comes in. The mother has never been quite right," argued her husband.

"I am not going to accept congratulations," said Mrs. Mornington. "I'm very sorry the marriage has been postponed. Mr. Wornock and Suzette are admirably adapted for each other, and he is no more cracked than I am. And remember the marriage is put off—not broken off."

"All the more reason why she should not send me back that Japanese absurdity," said Mrs. Roebuck, as if the paper-knife were of as much consequence as the marriage.

Suzette saw Mrs. Wornock nearly every day during that time of trouble—sometimes at Discombe, where they sat together in the music-room, or paced the wintry garden, saying very little to each other, but the elder woman taking comfort from the presence of the younger.

"I am miserable about him," she told Suzette; and that was all she would ever say of her son.

She had no suggestions to offer as to the cause of his disappearance. She uttered no complaint of his unkindness.

Suzette inquired if the police had made any discovery about Allan's assailant.

No, nothing; or, at least, Mrs. Wornock had heard of nothing.

"Lady Emily may know more than she cares to tell me," she said.

"Oh, I think not! Living in your house, indebted so deeply to your kindness, she could not be so churlish as to keep anything back."

"She thinks of nothing but her son. She would have no mercy upon any one who had injured him."

Her tone startled Suzette, with the recurrence of a terror which she had tried to dismiss from her mind as groundless and irrational.

"No, no; of course not. Who could expect her to have mercy? However hard the law might be, she would never think the sentence hard enough. Her only son, her idolized son, brought to the brink of the grave, perhaps doomed to die in spite of all that can be done for him."

Suzette tried to shut out that horrible idea—the hideous fancy that the ruffian who had attacked Allan Carew was no casual offender, extemporizing a crime on the suggestion of the moment, for the chance contents of a gentleman's purse, and an obvious watch and chain. Murder so brutal is not often the result of a chance encounter. Yet such things have been; and the alternative of a private vengeance—a vindictive jealousy culminating in attempted murder—was too horrible. Yet that dreadful suspicion haunted Suzette's pillow in the long winter nights—nights of wakefulness and sorrow.

Where was he, that miserable man, who had won her heart in spite of her better reason, and in loving whom she had seldom been without the sense of trouble and fear? His want of mental balance had been painfully obvious to her even in their happiest hours; and

she had felt that there was peril in a nature so capricious and s intense. She had discovered that for him religion was no strong rock. He had laughed away every serious question, and had made her feel that, in all the most solemn thoughts of life and after-life, they were divided by an impassable gulf: on his side, all that is boldest and saddest in modern thought: on her side, the simple, unquestioning faith which she had accepted in the dawn of her reason, and which satisfied an intellect not given to speculate upon the Unknowable. She had found that, not only upon religious questions, but even on the moral code of this life, there were wide differences in their ideas. Dimly, and with growing apprehension, she had divined the element of lawlessness in Geoffrey's character, revealed in his admiration of men for whom neither religion nor law had been a restraining influence—men for whom passion had been ever the guiding star. Lives that to her seemed only criminal were extolled by him as sublime. Such, or such a man, whose unbridled will had wrought ruin for himself and others, was lauded as one who had known the glory of life in its fullest meaning, who had verily lived, not crawled between earth and heaven.

In her own simple, unpretentious way, Suzette had tried to combat opinions which had shocked her; and then Geoffrey had laughed off her fears, and had promised that for her sake he would think as she thought, he would school himself to accept a spiritual guide of her choosing.

"Who shall my master be, Suzette? Shall I be broad and liberal with Stanley, severe with Manning, intense with Liddon, mystical with Newman? 'Thou for my sake at Allah's shrine, and I——" You know the rest. I will do anything to make my dearest happy."

"Anything except pretend, Geoffrey. You must never do that."

"Mustn't I? Then we had better leave religion out of the question; until, perhaps it may grow up in my mind, suddenly, like Jonah's gourd, out of my love for you."

In all the weary time while Allan was lying at the gate of death, and Geoffrey had so strangely vanished, Suzette had never doubted the love of her betrothed. The possibility of change or fickleness on his part never entered into her mind. Of the truth and intensity of his affection she, who had been his betrothed for nearly half a year, could not doubt. Her fears and anxieties took a darker form than any fear of alienated feelings, or inconstancy. Suicide, crime, madness, were the things she feared, though she never expressed her fears. Her father heard no lamentations from those

pale lips; but he could read the marks of distress in her countenance, and he was grieved and anxious for her sake.

He too invoked the powers of the detective police, but quietly, and without anybody's knowledge. He went up to London, and put the case of Geoffrey's disappearance before one of the sagest philosophers who had ever adorned the detective force at Scotland Yard, now retired and practising delicate investigations on his own account.

"Do you suppose there has been a fatal accident, or that he has been keeping out of the way on purpose?" he asked, after all particulars had been stated.

"An accident would have been heard of before now. No doubt he is keeping out of the way. Have you any reason to suppose him mentally afflicted?"

"Afflicted, no. Eccentric, perhaps, though I should hardly call him that—capricious, somewhat whimsical. Mentally afflicted? No, decidedly not."

"Ah! That trick of keeping out of the way is a very common thing in madness. If he is not mad, there must be some strong reason for his disappearance. He must have done something to put himself in jeopardy."

"Impossible! No, no, no. I can't entertain the idea for a moment," cried the General, thinking of that murderous attack in the wood.

"Do you wish us to make inquiries?"

"No, no, better not—the young man's mother is having everything done. I am not a relation—I only wanted the benefit of a professional opinion. I thought you might be able to throw some light——"

"No two cases are quite alike, sir; but I think you will find I am right here, and that in this case there is lunacy, or there has been a crime."

"Madness or crime," mused the General, as he left the office. "I can't go back to Suzette and tell her that. I must take her away again."

He announced his intention of starting for the Riviera next morning at the breakfast-table; but his daughter implored him piteously to let her stay at Matcham.

"It would be so heartless to go away while Allan is hovering between life and death, and while——"

She left the sentence unfinished. She could not trust herself to speak of Geoffrey.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

"HE HATH AWAKENED FROM THE DREAM OF LIFE."

IT was the day which was to have seen Suzette's wedding—the thirteenth of December, a dull, mild December, promising that green Christmas which is said to people churchyards with new-comers; a December to gladden the heart of the fox-hunter, and disappoint the skater.

Sitting in melancholy solitude by the drawing-room fire, on this grey, rainy morning, Suzette was glad to remember that she had prevented the sending out of invitation cards, and that very few people in Matcham knew the intended date of that wedding which was never to be. There were not many to think of her with especial pity on this particular day, sitting alone in her desolation, in her dark serge frock, with the black poodle, Caro, and her piano for her only companions. Even the companionship of that beloved piano had failed her since Geoffrey's disappearance. Music was too closely associated with his presence. There was not a single composition in her portfolio that did not recall him—not an air she played that did not bring back the words he had spoken when last her fingers followed the caprices of the composer. He had been her master as well as her lover—he had taught her the subtleties of musical expression—had breathed mind into her music.

Bessie Edgefield knew the date; but Bessie was sympathetic, and never officious or obtrusive. She would drop in by-and-by, no doubt, pretending not to remember anything particular about the day. She would be full of some little bit of village news, or a new book from Mudie's, or Mrs. Roebuck's last bonnet.

The wedding was to have been at two o'clock, a sensible, comfortable hour; giving the bride ample leisure in which to put on her wedding finery. The hours between breakfast and luncheon seemed longer than usual that morning, a long blank weariness, after Suzette had seen her father mount and ride away on his favourite hunter. The hounds met on the other side of the downs, on the borders of Hampshire. It would be late, most likely, before she would welcome that kind father to the comfortable fireside, and listen, or at least pretend to listen, to the varying fortunes of an adventurous day. And in the meantime she had the day all before her, to dispose of as best she might, that day which was to have seen her a bride.

Was she sorrowing for the lover who had forsaken her, as she sat looking with sad, tearless eyes into the fire? Was she regretting the happiness that might have been, thinking of a life which should have been cloudless? No, she had never contemplated a life of cloudless happiness with Geoffrey Wornock. She had loved that fiery spirit. Her love had been conquered by a mind stronger than her own, and she had submitted, almost as a slave submits to her captor. Mentally she had been in bondage, able to see all that was faulty and perilous in the character of her conqueror, yet loving him in spite of his faults.

But to-day his image was associated with a great terror—a terror of undiscovered crime—the fear that when next she heard his name spoken she would hear of him as an arrested criminal; or as a suicide, self-slaughtered in some quiet spot, where the searchers must needs be slow to find him.

Two o'clock. She had tried all her best-loved books in the endeavour to forget the dark realities of life; but books did not help her to-day. She never went into the dining-room for a formal luncheon when her father was out for the day; preferring some light refreshment of the kind which one hears of in Miss Austen's novels as "the tray," a modest meal of cake and fruit, with nothing more substantial than a sandwich. To-day even the sandwich was impossible. Her lips were dry with an inward fever. Her hands were cold as ice, her forehead was burning. "Was it raining?" she asked the servant. "No, the rain had ceased an hour ago," the man told her. She started up with a feeling of relief at the idea of escape from the dull, silent house; put on her hat and jacket, and went out of the glass door into the garden, where the mild winter had left a few flowers, pale Dijon roses amidst the thick foliage of honeysuckle and magnolia on the south wall, a lingering chrysanthemum here and there in a sheltered bend of the shrubbery. The air was full of the sweetness of herbs and flowers, and the freshness of the rain. Yes, it was a relief to be walking about, looking at the shrubs, shaking the rain from the feathery branches of the deodaras, searching for late violets behind a border of close-clipped box. It was a comfortable, old-fashioned garden, full of things that had been growing for the best part of a century, a garden of broad gravel walks, and square grass plots, espaliers hiding asparagus-beds, the scent of sweet herbs conquering the more delicate odours of violets and rare roses—a dear old garden to be happy in, and a quiet retreat in which to walk alone with sorrow.

Suzette walked alone with her sorrow for nearly an hour, thankful for the hazard which had carried her energetic aunt to Salisbury two days before, on a visit to her friends in the Close, and had thus spared her Mrs. Mornington's society on this particular day. To have been comforted, or to have been bewailed over, would have added to her burden. To walk alone in this dull old garden was best.

Not alone any more! She heard the rustling of branches at the other end of the long green alley, and a footstep—a heavier footfall than Bessie Edgefield's—on the moist gravel. Her heart throbbed with a startled expectancy. Joy or fear? She had no time to know which feeling predominated before she saw her lover coming quickly towards her. He was dressed, not as she had been accustomed to see him, in the corduroy waistcoat, short tweed coat, and knickerbockers of rustic out-of-door life, but in a frock-coat, light grey trousers, and white waistcoat, and was wearing a Sunday hat. She had time to note these details, and the malmaison carnation in his coat, and the light gloves which he was carrying, before he was at her side, looking down at her with wild, bloodshot eyes, grasping her arm with a strong hand, while those smart lavender gloves dropped from his unconscious grasp, and fell on the wet gravel, to be trampled underfoot like weeds.

"Why were you not at the church? Why are you wearing that dingy frock? You and your bridesmaids ought to have been ready an hour ago. I have been waiting for you. Have you forgotten what this day means?"

"Geoffrey! have not *you* forgotten? What madness to come back like this! What have you been doing with your life since the fourteenth of November? Where have you been hiding?"

"Where? Hiding! Nonsense! I have been travelling. I took it into my head, when Allan was coming back, that you didn't care for me, that he was the favoured lover, in spite of all. I had extorted your promise—and you were sorry you had ever given it. And I thought the best thing for me would be to make myself scarce, to go to Africa, Australia, anywhere. The world is big enough for two people to give each other a wide berth, but not big enough for Allan and me, if you liked him better than me. I was a fool, that's all: a fool to doubt my dearest! But there's no time to lose. We must be married before three. Come to the church as you are. What does it matter? I've put on my war-paint, you see. My valet seemed to think I was mad."

"You have seen your mother?"

"Yes, she has been plaguing me with questions. I gave her the slip. Allan is there, in my house. The irony of fate, isn't it? Hovering between life and death, my mother told me. How long will he hesitate between two opinions? I left them wondering, and hurried to the church to meet you, only to find emptiness. No one there! Not even the sexton. But there is still time. We can be married—you and I—with the sexton and pew-opener for witnesses, and can start for the other end of the world to-night."

"Geoffrey, why did you go away?" she asked, looking up at that wild face with infinite terror in her own.

The restless eyes, the convulsive working of the dry hot lips told their story only too plainly, the story of a mind distraught.

"Dear Geoffrey!" she said gently, with unspeakable pity for this human wreck, "there can be no marriage to-day. We are all in great trouble—about Allan."

"About Allan—always about Allan!" he interrupted savagely. "What has Allan to do with the matter? It is our wedding-day, yours and mine. I don't want Allan for my best man."

"There can be no marriage while Allan is ill, lying in your house, so nearly murdered; perhaps even yet to die from that cruel usage. They are looking for his murderer, Geoffrey. Was it wise for you to come back to this place, knowing that?"

"Knowing what?"

"That Allan's mother is determined to find the man who so nearly killed her son."

"What have I to do with her determination? I shall neither hinder nor help her."

Oh, the crafty smile, the malice and the cunning in that face, a look which Suzette had never seen till now. A look which made that once splendid countenance seem the face of a stranger.

She shrank from him involuntarily. He saw the sudden look of repulsion, and tightened his grasp upon her arm, until she gave a cry of pain.

"Did I hurt you?" loosening his grasp with a laugh. "What a fluttering little dove it is; so easily scared, so easily hurt. Come, Suzette, you are not going to cheat me, are you? This is the thirteenth of December. Do you hear? the thirteenth, the date fixed and appointed by you, by your very self. You shall not evade your own appointment. Come, love, come."

He took a few rapid steps forward, dragging her along with him, lifting her off her feet in his vehemence, but stopping suddenly when he found she was nearly falling.

"Geoffrey, how rough you are!"

"I didn't mean to be rough. But there's not a moment to lose. Why won't you come?"

"I am not coming. It is sheer madness to talk of our wedding. You have been away for a whole month of your own accord. Our marriage has been put off indefinitely. Poor Geoffrey!" looking at his haggard face with sudden tenderness, "how dreadfully ill you look; worse than the night you arrived from Zanzibar. I will go back to the Manor with you, and see you safe and at rest with your dear mother."

"No, no, I am never going back to the Manor where that dead man lies."

"Dead! Oh, God! He is not dead! What do you mean?"

"I don't want their dead man there. Well, he may live, perhaps. I don't want him there. His presence poisons my house, as his influence has poisoned my life. He has been a blight upon me. Like me, they say—like me, but of a different fibre. I know how to fight for my own hand. Will you come with me to the church quietly, of your own accord?"

"No, no. Impossible."

"Then I'll make you," he cried savagely, seizing her in his arms. "I won't be fooled. I won't be cheated. I am here to fulfil my part of the bond. I have not forgotten the date."

Then with a swift change of mood he loosened his angry hold upon her, fell on his knees at her feet, crying over the poor little hand which he clasped in both his own.

"Pity me, Suzette, pity me! I am the most miserable wretch in the world. I have been wandering about England like a criminal; a hateful country, no solitude, people staring and prying everywhere, a miserable overcrowded place where a man cannot be alone with his troubles, where there is no space for thought or memory. But I did not forget you. Your image was always there," touching his forehead, "*that* never faded. Only I forgot other things, or hardly knew which were dreams, or which were real. That grey afternoon in the wood, and the words that were said, and his face when I struck him! A dream? Yes, a dream! And then only yesterday the date upon a newspaper seen by accident—I have read no newspapers since I left Discombe—reminded me of to-day. I was at Padstow yesterday afternoon, an out-of-the-way village on the Cornish coast; and it has taken me all my time to get here to Discombe to-day in time to dress for my wedding. You should have seen my ser-

vant's face when I rang for him. I went into the house by the old door in the lobby, and walked up to my dressing-room without meeting a mortal. One never does meet any one at Discombe. The house is like the tomb of the Pharaohs, long passages, emptiness, silence."

He had risen from his knees at Suzette's entreaty, and was walking by her side, walking fast, speaking with breathless rapidity, eager, self-absorbed, holding her, lightly now, by the arm, as they paced the gravel walk.

"Higson was always a fool. I could see what he was thinking when I made him put out my frock-coat. The fellow thought I was mad. He wanted me to take a warm bath, and lie down for a bit before I saw my mother. He talked in the smooth wheedling way common people talk to lunatics, as if they were children; and then he ran off to fetch my mother; and she came, poor soul, and kissed and cried over me, and thanked God with one breath for my return, and with the next wailed about Allan. Allan was there, close by, in my room. I was not to speak above my breath, lest I should disturb him. I went to another room to dress, but I had ever so much trouble with Higson before I could get the things I wanted—London things he called them—and wouldn't I have this, or that, anything except what I asked for? So you see I had a lot of trouble, and then I walked to the church, and found it was two o'clock, and not a soul there."

"Geoffrey, what could you expect?"

"I expected you to keep your word. This is our wedding-day. I expected to find my bride."

"We must wait, Geoffrey. There is plenty of time."

"No, there is no time. I want to take you with me to the great lake, far away from this cramped narrow country, these teeming over-crowded cities, a soil criss-crossed with railways, shut in with streets and houses, not one wide horizon like that inland sea. Ah, how you would adore it, as I do, in storm or in calm, always beautiful, always grand, a place made for the mind to grow in, for the heart to rest in. Ah, how often in the deep of the moonlight nights I have wandered up and down those smooth sands, thinking of you, conjuring up your image in such warm reality that it froze my blood when I looked round and saw that the real woman was not at my side. You will go to Africa with me, Suzette?"

"Yes, dear, yes; by-and-by."

"Ah, that's what Higson said when I told him to put out a frock-coat, 'By-and-by.' But I answered with a 'Now!' that made him jump. Hark! there's some one coming; a step on the gravel."

A light step, a girl's quick footfall. It was the vicar's daughter, fresh and blooming in winter frock and winter hat. A creature of the kind that is usually nailed flat on a barn door was coiled gracefully round the little felt hat, pretending to have come from Siberia.

At the sight of Geoffrey, she started and looked aghast.

"Mr. Wornock! I thought you were hundreds of miles away."

"So I was, yesterday afternoon; but I happened to remember my wedding-day, and here I am, only to find that other people had forgotten."

"Oh, you happened to remember!" said Bessie, still staring at the white waistcoat, the malmaison carnation, the light grey trousers stained with rain and mud from the knee downwards, and worst of all the haggard countenance of the wearer. "You only remembered yesterday. How funny!"

Miss Edgefield would have made the same remark about a funeral in her present startled condition of mind.

Matcham had plenty of stuff for conversation within the next few days; for by that subtle process by which facts or various versions of facts are circulated in a rustic neighbourhood, people became aware of Geoffrey Wornock's return to Discombe, and of dreadful scenes that had occurred at Marsh House, where he had stayed for a couple of days, during which period Suzette was living at the Grove under her aunt and uncle's protection.

Yes, there had been scenes, tragical scenes, at Marsh House. Mrs. Wornock had been hastily summoned there, and had stayed under General Vincent's roof till her unhappy son was removed in medical custody, whither Matcham people knew not, though there were positive assertions as to locality on the part of the more energetic talkers. A physician had been summoned from London, a man of repute in mental cases; and Mrs. Wornock's brougham had driven away from Marsh House in the wintry dusk, with a pair of horses, and had not returned to the Manor till late on the following day; whereby it was concluded that the journey had been at least twenty miles.

Mr. Wornock had been taken away, placed under restraint, people told each other, arriving at the fact by the usual inductive process, and on this occasion unhappily accurate in their deduction. Geoffrey was in a doctor's care; a madman with lucid intervals; not violent, except in brief flashes of angry despair, but with occasional hallucinations, that delirium without fever which constitutes lunacy from the standpoint of law and medicine.

Before he passed into that dim under-world of the private lunatic asylum, he had admitted in more than one wild torrent of self-accusation his treacherous desertion of Allan in Africa, his savage assault upon Allan in the wood. They had met, and Allan had upbraided him for that treacherous desertion, and for stealing his sweetheart. Suzette's name had been like a lighted fuse to an infernal machine; and then the latent savage which is in every man had leapt into life, and there had been a deadly struggle, a fight for existence on Allan's part, a murderous onslaught from Geoffrey.

It needed not the opinion of experts from Scotland Yard, nor yet the discovery of Allan's watch and signet-ring under the rotten leaves in the deep hollow of an old oak half a mile from the spot where he himself had been found, to substantiate Geoffrey's self-accusation. His unhappy mother, who was with him at Marsh House throughout those last dreadful hours of raving and unrest, had never doubted his guilt from the time of his reappearance at Discombe.

It was months before Allan returned to the world of active life; but he left the Manor long before actual convalescence.

Not once, during those slow hours of returning health, did he allude to the cause of his terrible illness; and, on his mother timidly questioning him, he professed to have no recollection of the assault which had been so nearly fatal.

"Let the past remain a blank, mother. No good can come by trying to remember."

He was especially gentle and affectionate to Mrs. Wornock on her rare visits to his room during the earlier stages of his convalescence. Geoffrey's name was not spoken by either; but Allan's sympathetic manner told the unhappy mother that he knew her grief and pitied her.

Lady Emily was by no means ungrateful for the lavish hospitality with which Mrs. Wornock's house and household had been devoted to her son, yet she shrank with a natural abhorrence from a scene which was associated with Allan's peril and Geoffrey's crime. No kindness of Mrs. Wornock's could lessen that horror; and Lady Emily did her utmost to hasten the patient's removal to his own house, short of risking a relapse. When she saw him established in his cheerful bedchamber at Beechhurst, she felt as if she had taken him out of a charnel-house into the pleasant world of the living and the happy; a world to which Geoffrey Wornock was fated never to return.

"Quite hopeless," was the verdict of medical authority.

Mrs. Wornock left Discombe, and was said to be living in complete seclusion, attended upon by two or three of the oldest of the Manor servants, in a cottage near the private asylum where her son was a prisoner for life.

Before midsummer Allan's health was completely restored, and mother and son left for Suffolk, for the pastures and pine-woods, the long white roads and sandy commons, the wide horizons and large level spaces flooded with the red and gold of sunsets that are said to surpass the splendour of sunsets in more picturesque scenery. Lady Emily would have been completely happy in this quiet interlude, this tranquil pause in the drama of life, had not Allan talked of going back to Africa before the end of the year.

"Why not?" he asked, when she remonstrated with him. "There is nothing for me to do in England, and Africa doesn't mean a lifelong separation, mother, or I would not dream of going there. Every year shortens the journey. Six weeks, I think Consul Johnstone called it, to Lake Tanganyika. If I go, I promise to return in less than two years. You would hardly have time to miss me in your busy days here——"

"Busy about such poor trifles, Allan? Do you think my farm could fill the place of my son? If you were away, one great care and sorrow would fill every hour of my life. And think what an anxious winter I went through—a season of fear and trembling."

This plea prevailed. He could not disregard the care and love that had been lavished upon him. No, he would not allow himself to be drawn back to that dark continent which is said to exercise a subtle influence over those who have once crossed her far-reaching plains, and rested beside her wide waters, and lived her life of adventure and surprise. No, it was too soon for the son to leave his mother, she having none but him. He had done with love; but duty still claimed him; and he stayed.

A quiet winter at Beechhurst, with his mother to keep house for him, a good deal of hunting, and so much attention and kindly feeling from everybody in the neighbourhood, that he could not altogether play the hermit. He was forced into visiting, and into entertaining his friends, and Lady Emily was very happy in playing her part of hostess in the livelier circle of Matcham, while the shutters were closed at Fendyke, and the bailiff had full sway on the white farm, allowed to do what he liked there, which was generally something different from what his mistress liked.

Life was made easier for Allan that winter by the absence of Suzette, who was travelling with her father—easier, and emptier, for the one presence which would have given a zest to life was wanting. He told himself that it was better so, better for his peace, since she could never be anything to him. The disappearance of his rival would make no difference in her feelings for Allan; for no doubt her affection for Geoffrey would only be strengthened by their tragical separation and her lover's miserable fate.

"If she should ever care for any one else, it will be a stranger," Allan told himself in those long reveries which the mere sight of a well-known garden wall, or the chimneys of Marsh House seen above the leafless elms as he rode past, could evoke. "She will never waste a thought upon me."

Other people were more hopeful. Mrs. Mornington told her friends in confidence that her niece's acceptance of that unfortunate young man had been a folly, into which she had been entrapped by Geoffrey's dominant temper, and by her passion for music.

"She never loved that unhappy young man as she once loved Allan Carew."

"And now, no doubt, she and Mr. Carew will make it up and marry," said the confidant, male or female, as the case might be.

"Not now: but some day, yes, perhaps," replied Suzette's aunt, with a significant nod.

And the day came—when Geoffrey Wornock's passionate heart was still for ever—had been stilled for more than two years—and when to him, at rest in the silence of the family burial-place at Discombe, by the side of the mother who had only survived him by a few weeks, the sound of Suzette's wedding-bells, the knowledge of Allan's happiness could bring no pain.

Allan's day came—long and late, after years of patient waiting, when Suzette had attained the sober age of six and twenty; but it was a day of cloudless happiness, which promised to last to the end of life. No fear of the future marred the joy of the present. The later love that had grown up in Suzette's heart for her first lover, was too strongly based upon knowledge and esteem to suffer the shadow of change.

THE END.

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